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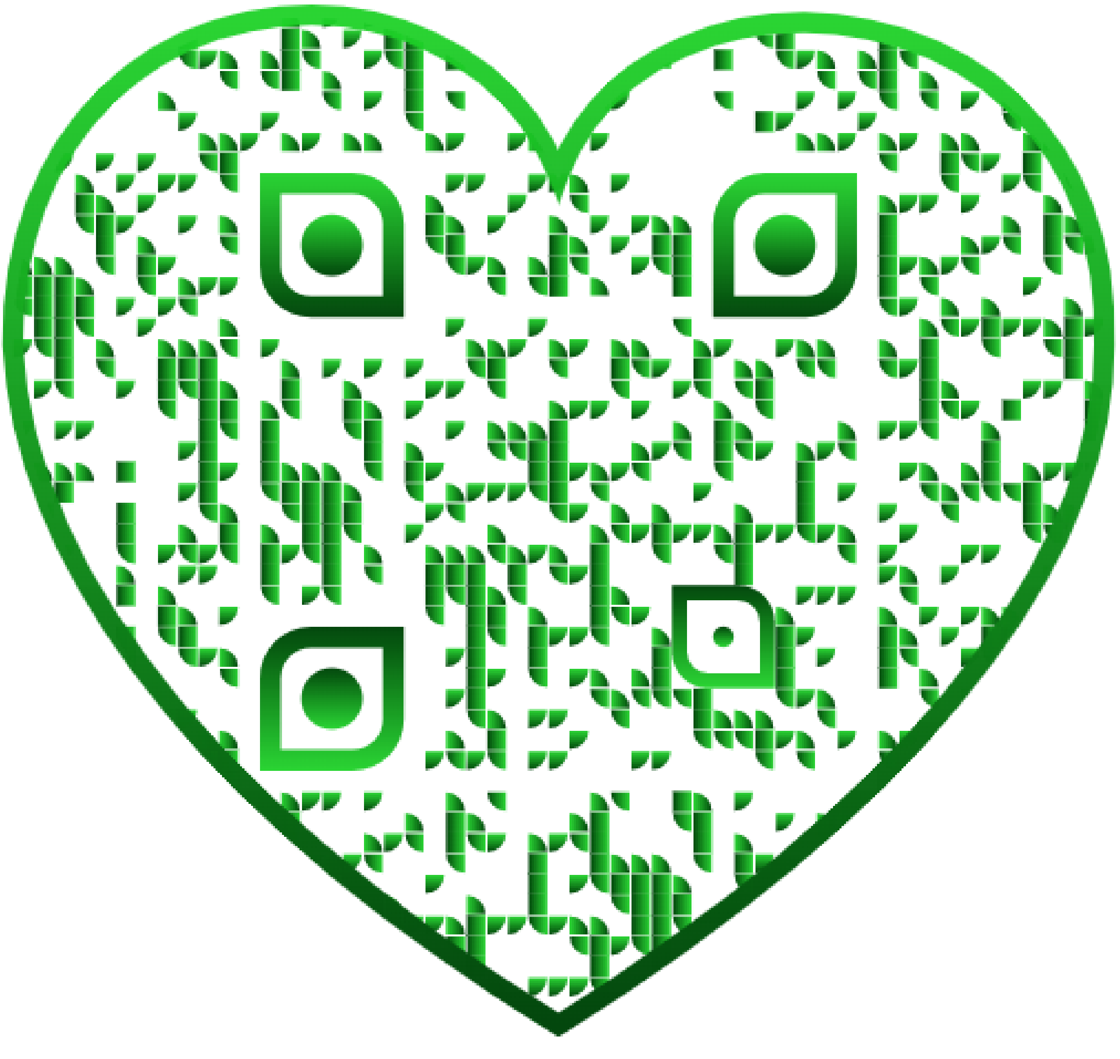

AUTOCAR PROMOTION

THE ALL-ELECTRIC MINI ACEMAN

SIX BIG THINGS to love

You know exactly what you're getting with a MINI Cooper. Striking looks. Parking-friendly dimensions. And a fantastically fun drive. But what if you want something that delivers those iconic MINI characteristics with a dash of five-door practicality? That's where the new MINI Aceman comes in. Compact enough to make light work of the city, but spacious enough to seat five and carry their luggage. And, perhaps most importantly, we believe it perfectly exhibits those all-important MINI qualities. Here are six reasons why.

#1 LOOKING AHEAD

The 'Charismatic Simplicity' of the MINI Aceman puts a modern spin on the brand's styling language, while also ensuring that it's unmistakably MINI in its design. As Head of MINI Design Oliver Heilmer says: "The MINI Aceman looks agile and exudes a determination to forge ahead."

#2 PUNCHY PERFORMANCE

Whatever your needs, there's a MINI Aceman powertrain that will suit. Power outputs range from 184bhp to 258bhp, so acceleration is instant and swift. The Aceman can cover up to 251 miles on a charge, and charging doesn't take long either – a 10-80% top-up takes a mere 31 minutes at a DC rapid charge point.

#3 LIVING SPACE

The MINI Aceman features a low-slung electric platform that allows the car to comfortably accommodate five adults. And there's plenty of room in the boot for all their things. The split-folding rear seats add an extra layer of practicality, while the rest of the cabin is filled with handy storage areas.

#4 WELL CONNECTED

The responsive circular 9.4in OLED display that sits front and centre in the Aceman provides you with all the driving information you need, and there are clever widgets for navigation, audio and mobile phone connections. You also get wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity.

#5 APPY DAYS

You can stay connected to your Aceman even when you're not near it, using the intuitive MINI app. This allows you to do cool things such as setting the cabin temperature before you leave the house, locking or unlocking the car, or programming the sat-nav. The app will even help you to locate your car in a busy car park.

#6 MAXIMUM FUN

The Aceman has been designed to make every journey a joy. Its sharp steering and precise dampers endow it with a nimble, agile feel, while the batteries have been placed as low as possible to minimise body roll. Add in the punchy electric drivetrain options and you'll have a large grin at the end of every trip.

MINI

WHY NOT BOOK A TEST DRIVE TODAY?

Test drives subject to status and availability

COMMENT

IS ASTON FINALLY SET TO BE BRITAIN'S FERRARI?

We've seen Ferrari become a huge success story in recent years, and the formidable F80 (driven, p20) is its latest impressive chapter.

Closer to home, Aston Martin has long aspired to be Britain's Ferrari. But it has been an uphill battle. Its stock market flotation quickly bombed and has yet to recover, and despite the billions of part-owner Lawrence Stroll, who came on board in 2020, the company has yet to achieve a solid financial triumph.

Over recent years, Aston Martin has had a number of CEOs, several overhauled strategies and delays to its EV launch (although that is far from unique to the brand). The job of capitalising on its excellent name, heritage and model line-up now falls to Adrian Hallmark, who became CEO in September 2024 after significant success leading Bentley.

In our interview with him (p48), he identifies numerous ways in which Aston Martin can become profitable – from updating cars more often to savvy parts efficiencies to better knowing the pricing of rivals' hypercars. It's a fascinating read.

There's every sense that, with Hallmark at the helm and his proven track record, this is Aston Martin's greatest chance in many years to come good. Britain's Ferrari might firmly be in sight after all.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk YouTube TikTok

Wacky Honda 0 preview

Here's an electric SUV like you've never seen before. Jonathan Bryce talks you through its technology, design and specification.

The MPV with a wild V10

At its 1990s peak, the Williams squad took a Renault Espace and mounted a Formula 1 engine in its middle. We find out more...

Pagani power for peanuts

Is now the time to buy a Mercedes CL65 AMG – complete with a 6.0-litre V12 engine that would go on to power the Zonda?

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"Seeing one makes children fall off their bicycles" p26

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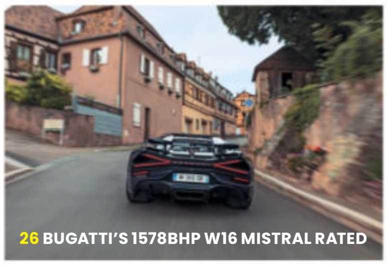
20 ONCE-A-DECADE FERRARI HYPERCAR



26 BUGATTI'S 1578BHP W16 MISTRAL RATED

GETTY IMAGES

PORSCHE
LEO GE 861

GOODWOOD FESTIVAL OF SPEED

CAYENNE EV SET TO PACK 986BHP ELECTRIC PUNCH

Top-spec version of new Porsche EV poised to be UK's most potent SUV

Porsche is about to take the boldest step yet on its electrification journey by revealing a fourth-generation, battery-electric version of its most popular model, the Cayenne SUV. To be unveiled in production form later this year, the new model will be on sale in the UK this time next year.

However, recognising the risk of launching a full EV version of its biggest-selling model into markets whose demand for such cars continues to waver, the firm will carry on selling and developing its existing ICE-powered Cayenne at least until 2035, said a Porsche spokesman, "and maybe beyond that".

A prototype version of the new electric Cayenne, still covered in camouflage, appeared in action at last weekend's Goodwood Festival of Speed, driven at full tilt on the hill by GT racer and Porsche development driver Gabriela Jilkova, who the previous weekend took the prototype up the historic Shelsley Walsh hillclimb in just 31.3sec – a full four seconds quicker than any SUV previously.

> **"All versions of the new SUV will have two-motor, four-wheel-drive layouts"**

Porsche won't yet reveal full engineering details of its new Cayenne EV, but the model is taller and longer than the petrol car, sits on a longer wheelbase and is said to "feel a bit bigger when you drive it". It also has a generously sized frunk in the nose.

All versions of Weissach's new electric SUV – likely to be offered in a three-model line-up of Cayenne, Cayenne S and Cayenne Turbo – will have two-motor, four-wheel-drive layouts, using Porsche's own design of motors front and rear. The rear motor is new and was developed after it was found that the Cayenne EV needed more power at the back axle.

The company isn't yet revealing power outputs for its three models, but they are likely to be around 395bhp for the entry model, 590bhp for the S and more than 986bhp (1000PS) for the Turbo version – which would make it the UK's most powerful SUV.

Details of the EV's official touring range are still being worked out, but Porsche's target is understood to be around 370 miles. That would put it on a par with the longest-legged Lotus Eletre, its closest rival.

Porsche hasn't yet revealed the Cayenne EVs' performance figures, but the Turbo should be "at least as quick" as the lighter but less powerful top-spec combustion-powered model, posting a 0-62mph time of under three seconds and an eye-watering 0-124mph time of around 10 seconds. Top speeds of all three Cayennes are understood to be restricted to 155mph, as is the case with all Porsche SUVs.

All versions will use active dampers for their all-independent suspension systems, and top models at least are likely to have rear-wheel steering to improve both low-speed agility (bearing in mind the longer wheelbase) and high-speed stability.

Porsche is still developing the final details of the new EVs' interiors, and it won't yet allow the cabins to be photographed. However, it is understood that, as with the Taycan and rival luxury EVs, the Cayenne driver will be able to switch on a synthesised engine sound – including one produced from recordings of "a genuine Porsche V8 engine" – if desired.

Sascha Niesen, verification and validation manager for the Cayenne EV, said there are "no surprises" in the new model's basic layout compared with that of the Macan EV, but the torque distribution system has been improved over the Macan system, to cope with the extra power, bulk and weight and because Porsche's policy is to carry out very detailed development programmes for every model.

"We require every one of our cars to be naturally well behaved, before the electronics come into play," said Niesen. "Our chassis systems are there to help, but not to hide chassis flaws."

UK launch details for the car have yet to be released, but it is likely the company will start taking orders early next year for deliveries in the early summer.

STEVE CROPLEY

WE RIDE UP THE HILL IN THE NEW CAYENNE EV

It's quite large and tall so we're sitting high. Looking at the first double-apex, I wonder what this Cayenne EV's body roll will feel like; actually, I've already got an idea as this is a Porsche with active dampers. I'll back it to stay planted.

At the wheel is Czech Porsche development driver Gabriela Jilkova (pictured, below). Today, she has more than 1000 horses underfoot from a two-motor set-up.

We are at the front of the queue. This may be an EV but we're hearing the Cayenne's optional synthesised V8 burble at proper volume. And here, it seems entirely appropriate.

The Goodwood starter gives us the thumbs-up. I expect hard acceleration but I get an explosion. My head hits the restraint behind, I'm depressed inches into upholstery that previously felt firm and my innards are rapidly rearranged. The loads are instant, yet it's surprisingly quiet in here.

Nobody will yet tell me how much torque this thing has, but it's got to be four figures. Even though it's all deployed at once via four fat, 22in Pirelli P Zeros, there's barely a squeak of wheelspin. That's what electronics can do.

The trees are a blur, and we've got to be doing 90mph when we turn in to that first double-apex. Gabi dabs the brakes, though retardation probably comes as much from the powerful regenerative braking.

Out of the trees, the track straightens and widens. There's time for a lightning glance at Gabi – still ice cool. We storm through Molecomb as if on rails, my body pinned.

Next, the famed Flint Wall. It looks like a serious obstacle at first sight, but a fast, precise, right-then-left jink is easy for Gabi and this EV. Transitions like that can upset high-riding cars, but the Porsche is planted like a sports car. This *is* a sports car.

The run is then over in a flash. This may well be the quickest electric minute of my life. Gabi says we hit 115mph. "Good," says Gabi with a contented smile. "Fantastic," say I. **SC**

The Cayenne EV will be sold in standard, S and top-spec Turbo forms

NEW LEXUS V8 SUPERCAR SETS SIGHTS ON VANTAGE

Aston-chasing GT3 homologation coupé is unleashed at Goodwood

A new V8-engined Lexus supercar that will rival the likes of the Aston Martin Vantage and Mercedes-AMG GT has been run in public for the first time.

The GT Concept is the homologated variant of the incoming GT3 GR racer, which was itself revealed in concept form in 2022. Both models took to the hillclimb at Goodwood's Festival of Speed.

The road-going version of the GT3 GR – which has been spotted by spy photographers over the past few months – is likely to be badged as a Lexus rather than a Toyota. Such a move would be in keeping with the premium brand's history of creating large-engined sports cars, including the LFA, RC F and LC 500.

As such, it is thought to preview what could be the spiritual successor to the acclaimed LFA – and may take the LFR name.

GT Concept made its public debut on Goodwood's hill

A production version of the GT Concept is likely to arrive in showrooms at the end of next year.

The car is being created because FIA homologation rules dictate that GT3 racers must share their basic body design with a related road car. Aston Martin, BMW, Ferrari, Ford, Lamborghini, Lexus, McLaren, Mercedes-AMG and Porsche currently all sell GT3 customer cars.

Toyota has previously said it will continue "commercialising motorsports cars rather than simply adapting production vehicles for use in motorsports", as it did with the rally-honed GR Yaris hot hatchback.

> **"It is thought to preview what could be a successor to the acclaimed LFA"**

Running up Goodwood's hill, the soundtrack of the GT3 prototype, which sports a huge rear wing, is unmistakably that of a highly strung V8. But the quieter road car mule suggests it will add some type of hybrid assistance, most likely to meet emission regulations.

No current GR models use a hybrid powertrain, but the performance division is extensively testing the technology.

Speaking to Autocar last year, Hiroyuki Yamada, a GR engineer working on the project, said: "We can use hybrid for future cars. We will use it in our motorsport activities in the future, because of emissions.

"This technology we will apply to both motorsport and passenger [car] engines. In the future, we want a more fuel-efficient engine [for GR cars]."

The plan to fit GR models with hybrid power has been long mooted by Toyota.

In 2023, chief technology officer Hiroki Nakajima told Autocar: "Hybrid systems are always a good solution for environmental cars, not just for passenger cars but for sporty cars as well."

No specifications of the road car have been released yet, but the race car will produce around 500-600bhp and weigh no more than 1300kg, in line with GT3 regulations.

With the addition of a hybrid system, the road

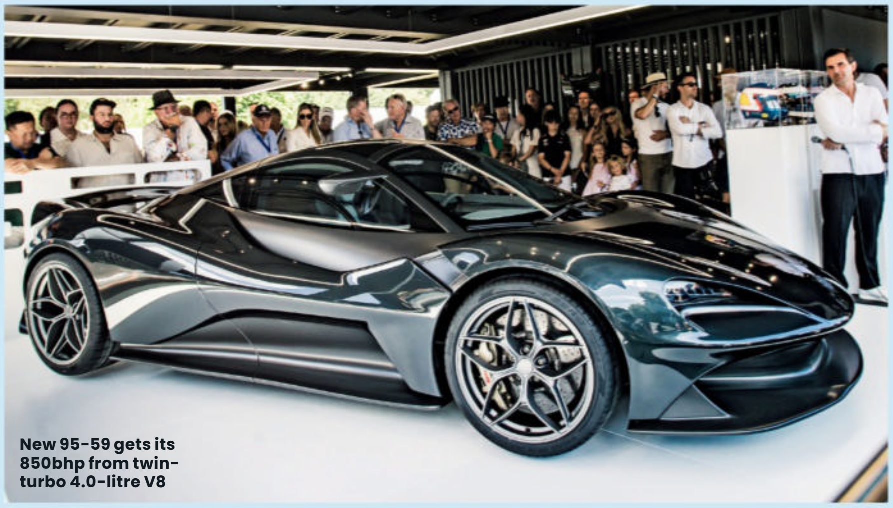
Production version of GT Concept could get hybrid assistance

car is expected to produce closer to 700bhp and take the fight to the recently revealed 671bhp Aston Martin Vantage S.

Lexus has retired its RC and LC coupés in Europe and hasn't officially commented on plans for any replacements, although the outlandish Electrified Sport concept that it revealed in 2021 emphasises its continued commitment to developing performance cars.

That concept, which is due to reach production by the end of the decade, is electric rather than V8-powered. But it has been confirmed that it shares its carbonfibre monocoque underpinnings with Toyota's GR GT3 concept. It also has a similar cab-rearward silhouette, which opens the way for Lexus to potentially offer two closely related supercars – based on the same chassis but using totally different powertrains – within the next five years.
WILL RIMELL

LANZANTE SALUTES ICONIC McLAREN F1 WITH 850BHP, 1250KG THREE-SEATER



New 95-59 gets its 850bhp from twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8

BRITISH PERFORMANCE specialist Lanzante has created a homage to the McLaren F1 with its own three-seat supercar, which produces 700bhp per tonne.

Called the 95-59, the limited-run model is a tribute to the Lanzante-run McLaren F1 GTR that won the 1995 Le Mans 24 Hours. The Petersfield-based firm's new three-seat supercar produces 850bhp and 649lb ft from a mid-mounted 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8.

The car is based on the McLaren-built Monocage carbonfibre chassis used by the P1, 720S and Senna, but it has been adapted by Lanzante to accommodate three occupants.

Weight has been pared back to 1250kg, aided by the fitting of carbonfibre body panels and, as part of the optional LM30 Pack, a host of weight-reducing features, such as forged aluminium wheels, titanium exhaust tailpipes and gold-plated heat-shielding.

Combined, these help to give the three-seater a power-to-weight ratio that is just 39bhp per tonne shy of the new 1183bhp Ferrari F80 (see p20). It betters the original F1 by 158bhp per tonne.

The 95-59 sends 850bhp to the rear wheels via a seven-speed sequential gearbox. A large active rear wing helps to keep the car stable at speed and increase grip in corners.

While full technical details have yet to be confirmed, the 95-59 is expected to hit 62mph from rest in around 2.5sec.

The supercar, which made its world debut at the Goodwood Festival of Speed, was shaped by former McLaren designer Paul Howse. The Briton oversaw the exterior design of the P1, 570S, 720S and Artura, and many McLaren-like elements are evident on the 95-59, particularly at the rear.

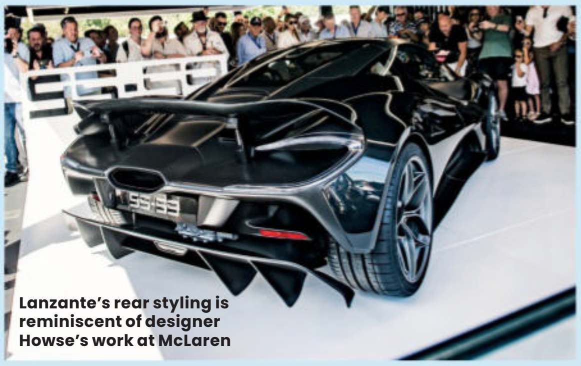
In keeping with its exclusive positioning, the 95-59 features dihedral doors, similar to those found on hypercars such as the Koenigsegg Jesko.

Inside, the centrally sited driver's seat faces a cockpit layout that features physical buttons around and even above the steering wheel. The driver's display shows only key information.

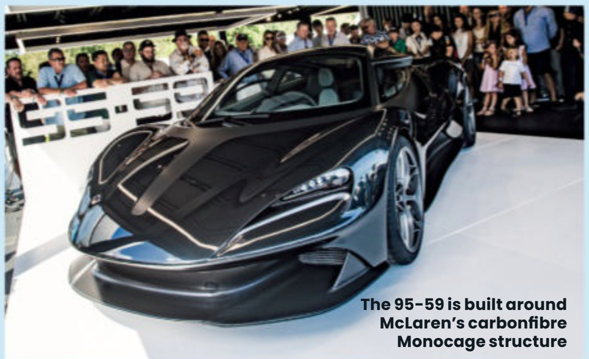
The two passenger seats are positioned either side of the driver.

Company founder Dean Lanzante said the car is the result of "everything I personally and we as a business have learned and experienced over three decades since winning Le Mans".

The 95-59 is limited to 59 examples, each priced at £1.2 million.



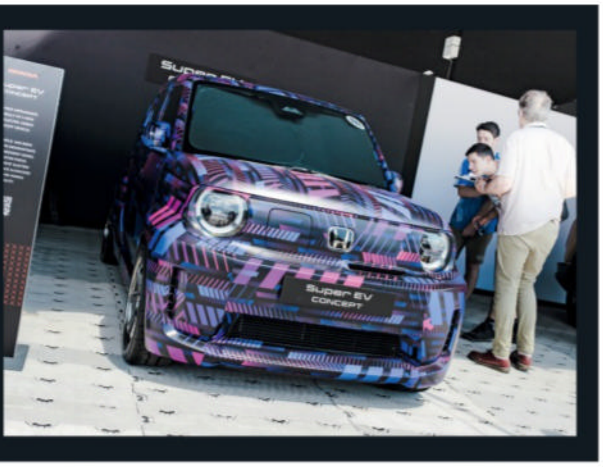
Lanzante's rear styling is reminiscent of designer Howse's work at McLaren



The 95-59 is built around McLaren's carbonfibre Monocage structure

HONDA PLOTS 500E RIVAL

Honda has shown off its vision of a small, fun-to-drive EV, which could serve as a potential successor to the Honda E, at the Goodwood Festival of Speed. Called the Super EV Concept, it previews a rival for the Hyundai Inster and Fiat 500e and has already been tested in the UK.



IONIQ 6 N REVEALED AS 'MORE PRECISE' 5 N SIBLING

'Sharp and controllable' electric sports saloon is due later this year

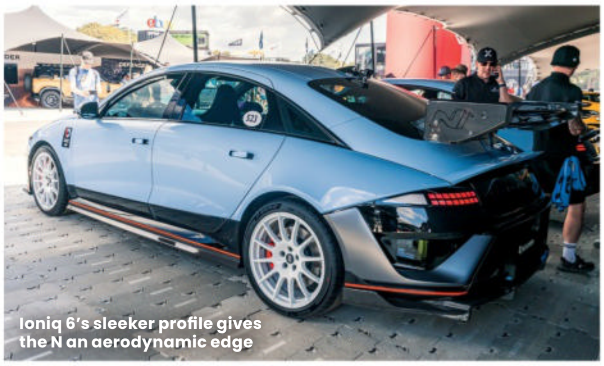
The Hyundai N division's second electric performance car, the 641bhp Ioniq 6 N, will arrive this autumn as a sharper, keener and "more sophisticated and predictable" follow-up to the lauded Ioniq 5 N.

Speaking to Autocar, N founder and vice-president Joon Park said the new 6 N will take advantage of its lower saloon silhouette to be a different proposition from its smaller sibling, with which it shares a powertrain.

"We want a different type of driving experience between the two," he said. "The 5 N is a bit wilder, the 6 N is more precise."

Every new design element on the 6 N, which is based on the latest facelifted Ioniq 6 but with wider wheel arches to cover a 60mm increase in track width front and rear, "serves a purpose", according to N's chief designer, Eduardo Ramírez.

There's a lower nose that, said Ramírez, "stresses the silhouette", with a larger front mesh, N-specific winglets to channel air along the body side and, most notably, a large rear spoiler. "In combination with the front splitter it balances the car's aerodynamics," added Ramírez.



Ioniq 6's sleeker profile gives the N an aerodynamic edge

"An 'N Grip Boost' button releases the full 641bhp regardless of drive mode"

The 6 N shares the same 641bhp and 568lb ft outputs and four-wheel-drive layout as the 5 N, owing to a 234bhp motor at the front and a 406bhp motor at the rear. However, Sven Risch, N's head of chassis control and braking, described it as "an all-new car, technically".

New motor magnets improve performance durability, while a 7kWh heater for the 84kWh (total capacity) battery brings it quickly to optimum operating temperature.

Significantly, the 6 N has a lower centre of gravity than the 5 N. This, said Risch, combined with its increased track width, helps make the handling "much more reachable and controllable". He added: "It's much more sharp."

In terms of hardware, there are electronically controlled dampers, an electronically controlled limited-slip rear differential

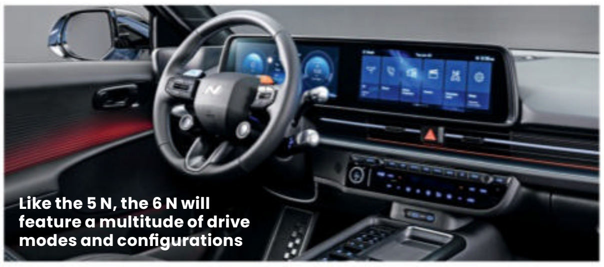
N HASN'T PUT COMBUSTION ON ICE

Joon Park wants to find "some kind of substitute" for the retired i30 N and i20 N (inset) hot hatches.

It follows Park's earlier comments that N division – with a line-up that consists of two electric cars – isn't only for EVs.

He said: "You know I love smaller and lighter cars. We need some kind of substitute for the i20 N and i30 N customers, and this is the area we need to go. We know that and we're prepared."

Elaborating on his previous comments, Park said: "I can tell you that combustion N models aren't finished, but it depends on regulation and the market. We will not stop with ICE cars, but it takes time and money."



Like the 5 N, the 6 N will feature a multitude of drive modes and configurations

HYUNDAI
IONIQ 6 N

and a new design of forged 20in alloy wheels, with holed spokes to reduce weight and which are shod with 275/35 Pirelli P Zero tyres.

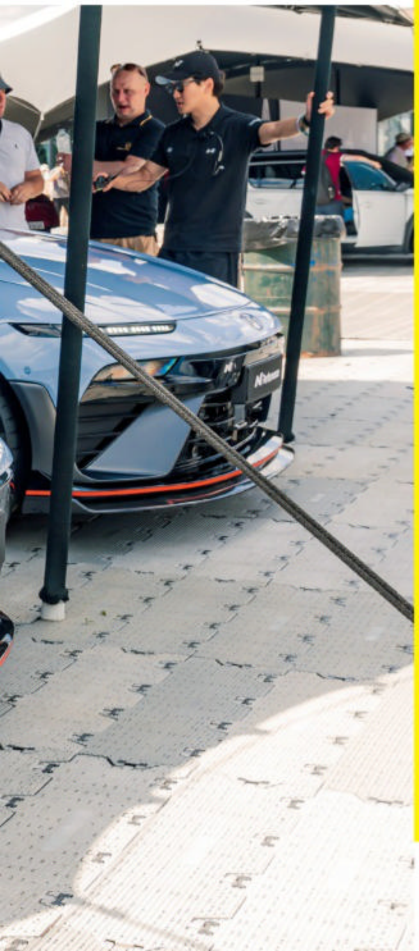
No kerb weight or 0-62mph time has yet been quoted. At 4.94m long, the 6 N is 220mm longer than a 5 N, but a similar kerb weight to the 5 N's 2235kg is anticipated.

Like the 5 N, many of the 6 N's driving characteristics will be defined by software. There is torque vectoring via braking on both axles, an 'N Grip Boost' button to release the full 641bhp regardless of which of the plethora of drive modes the car is in, and a development of the 5 N's artificial engine sound and gearshift points.

There are both new drive and altered drive modes, too, including an enhanced Drift mode that has three-stage adjustment for 'initiation', 10-stage adjustment for 'angle' and 10-stage adjustment for 'smoke' (ie wheelspin) elements. A new 'N track manager' allows the driver to programme their own circuit and record lap times.

Production of the Ioniq 6 N will begin in September for the South Korean market, with UK sales expected late in the year. Pricing details have yet to be revealed, but Park said he would prefer it to be more affordable than the £65,010 5 N.

MATT PRIOR



BYD's Denza B5 drew big crowds as it deployed its 677bhp on the hillclimb

10 MORE EXCITING GOODWOOD DEBUTS

The Festival of Speed is a chance to see important new cars for the first time – and this year's event was an absolute whirlwind of hot debuts. Newcomers included BYD's Defender rival, the Denza B5, which showcased the potential of its 677bhp PHEV drivetrain with a run up the hill. It's set to appear in dealerships next year.

ALPINE A390
Watch out, Porsche… Alpine's third model is a Macan Electric rival that uses trick torque-vectoring tech to offer sports car handling.

MERCEDES-BENZ CLA
Mercedes' most important new car in years is finally here, with the choice of petrol power or an EV that offers a 484-mile range.

MG CYBER X
What if MG made a Defender? You could be looking at it. The next model in the Cyber range is likely to be an electric SUV based on this concept.

TWR SUPERCAT
This wild 600bhp supercar is not a restomod but a carbonfibre-bodied Jaguar XJS tribute with 600bhp and a £225,000 price.

XIAOMI SU7 ULTRA
This is the fastest production EV at the Nürburgring – and it's made by a smartphone firm. The Porsche Taycan Turbo rival packs 1527bhp.

PORSCHE 963 RSP
So many hypercars are touted as 'Le Mans racers for the road', but this one actually is. Porsche's domineering 963 dons plates and indicators.

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R ULTIMATE
Fan-favourite hot hatch bows out for this generation with a special edition that's limited to just 40 examples, of which 10 will come to the UK.

JAGUAR TYPE 00
As the clock ticks down to the unveiling of Jaguar's electric GT later this year, the divisive Type 00 concept made its UK debut in Sussex.

BOVENSIEPEN ZAGATO
The first car from the Bovensiepen family since they sold their Alpina brand to BMW is a Zagato-designed two-door GT with a 603bhp six-pot.

OFFICIAL PICTURE

MG TARGETS TESLA WITH HIGH-TECH EVs

MG's premium offshoot reveals saloon and SUV to take on Model 3 and Y

MG has launched a new sub-brand in the UK to rival Tesla with a high-tech saloon and crossover in the vein of the Model 3 and Model Y.

The new 5 and 6 are the first UK-bound models from the recently established EV marque IM, which launched its first cars in China in 2022 and now has a four-strong line-up that closely matches that of its US rival.

IM was founded in 2020 by MG's parent company SAIC, e-commerce giant Alibaba and R&D specialist Zhangjiang Hi-Tech. The brand made its European debut at the Geneva show last year, where it showed the IM 5 saloon and IM 6 SUV – now both confirmed to be heading to MG dealerships, where they will be branded as MG models, in the coming months.

The IM 5 is a four-door saloon with a maximum claimed range of 442 miles from a 100kWh lithium ion battery, plus 800V charging architecture that enables a 10-80% top-up in just 17 minutes.

The company has not given official specifications yet, but IM's platform is said to support charging at up to 396kW – faster than the vast majority of public chargers currently in the UK.

MG has not confirmed whether the recently revealed IM 6 Lightyear Edition, which has a 900V semi-solid-state battery and a 400kW peak charging speed, will come to the UK.

The 5 will also be available as a shorter-range variant with a 75kWh battery. It is expected to give a range of around 330 miles and will open the line-up at £39,450. The bigger battery bumps the price to £44,995, while the more powerful Performance version starts

OFFICIAL PICTURE

Corvette E-Ray uses a 634bhp petrol-electric hybrid powertrain

CORVETTE E-RAY SPEARHEADS GM'S UK RETURN

THE 634BHP HYBRID Corvette E-Ray is being launched in the UK as the latest stage of GM's plan to revive its business in Europe.

The American-made supercar will be the third Corvette sold here, alongside the pure-combustion Stingray and track-honed Z06.

The new model's arrival coincides with GM expanding its dealer network as it prepares for the imminent relaunch of Cadillac, which is due to bring the Optiq and Lyriq electric SUVs to the UK. In the meantime, the E-Ray will form the spearhead of GM's UK relaunch.

Priced from £153,440, it is powered by a 6.2-litre naturally aspirated V8 engine and a single, front-mounted electric motor. The mid-mounted V8 puts 475bhp through the rear wheels, while the electric motor sends 159bhp to the front axle, giving a combined 634bhp and four-wheel drive.

This allows the Corvette to dispatch the 0-62mph sprint in 2.9sec, matching the vastly more expensive Ferrari 296 GTB and Maserati MC20.

A 1.9kWh battery pack enables four miles of engine-off driving.

"The IM line-up closely matches Tesla's in price and performance"

IM 5 saloon (left) will cost from £39,450; IM 6 SUV will start at £47,995

from £48,495. The line-up is similar to the Model 3's in terms of price and on-paper performance.

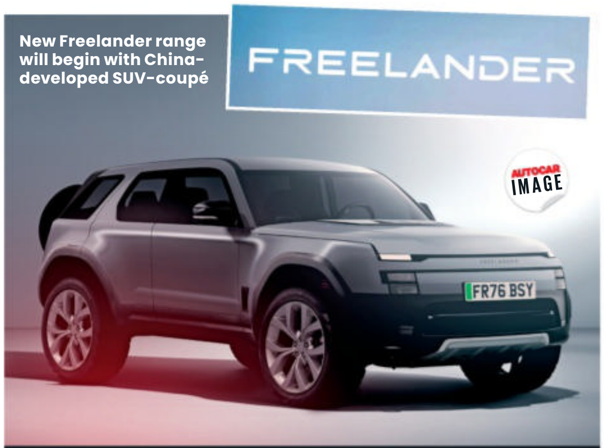
The technically identical IM 6 will not be offered with the smaller battery, but it closely rivals the mid-rung Model Y with a starting price of £47,995 for the Long Range car and £50,995 for the Performance.

Full powertrain specs are not yet known, but MG says the most powerful IM 5 uses a new generation of motor known as 'Hurricane'. It gives the IM 5 a rapid 0-62mph time of 3.2sec, or 3.5sec for the SUV in top-rung dual-motor guise.

The two cars are largely identical inside, with a huge 26.3in wraparound infotainment display and 10.5in central touchscreen featuring in place of a physical control interface.

Both will be offered with a panoramic roof, a 'rainy night' driving mode, automatic park assist and rear-steer, which MG says cuts the IM 5's turning circle to just under 10 metres.

FELIX PAGE



New Freelander range will begin with China-developed SUV-coupé

FREELANDER EV ON ITS WAY

JLR has confirmed Autocar reports that the first model in the new Freelander range will be an electrified, full-size SUV that is due in the second half of next year.

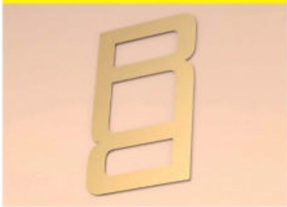
Head of China, Qing Pan, added that the first car – a Porsche Macan-style model – will "echo the original spirit of Freelander", but will be brought up to date "to appeal to discerning, technologically savvy Chinese consumers". The revived brand is a tie-up between JLR and Chery. The Chinese car maker is responsible for the tech and platform, while JLR oversees the design.

The announcement was accompanied by JLR revealing the logo for the revived Freelander brand.

NEW RANGE ROVER LOGO REVEALED

A bold new logo for the Range Rover brand has been revealed by JLR in a recent presentation to investors.

The motif – made up of two Rs – arrives ahead of the line-up's first EV appearing later this year. It will be used "where our familiar Range Rover device mark does not fit, such as on a label", said the brand, confirming it wouldn't take over from the spelled-out 'Range Rover' script that currently adorns its models.



Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

Tyre tread patterns are mostly science plus a little bit of art

AI GETS A GRIP ON THE BLACK ART OF MAKING TYRES

LIKE SO MANY other things, tyre design is falling under the influence of AI. The tech is being used to predict the effectiveness of different tread patterns and simulate how they might behave in the real world. Tyres have come a long way during their evolution, and this is one of those cases where a glimpse back into the past helps put things in perspective.

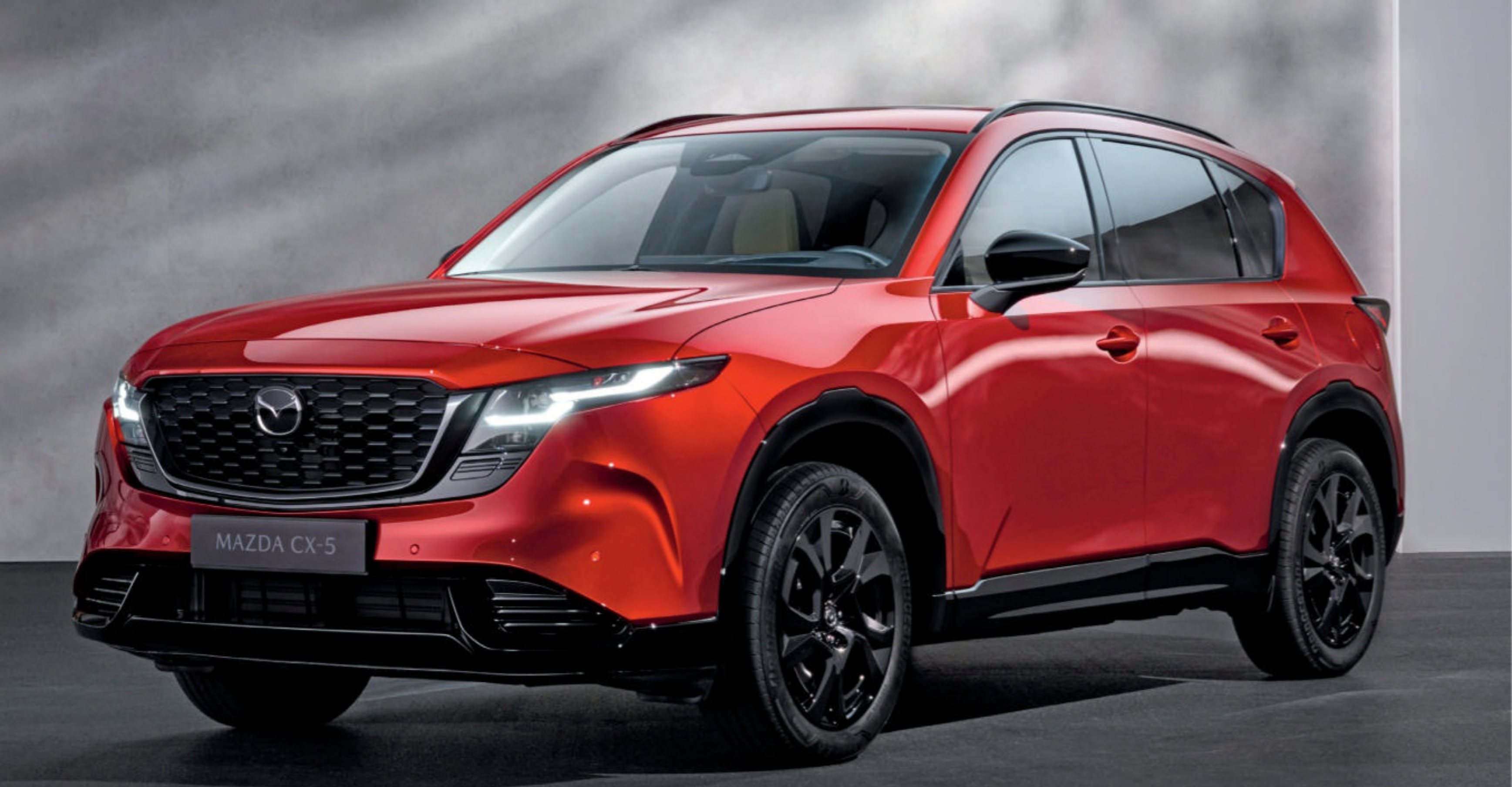
It's just over 120 years since the first tread of any kind appeared, and although Dunlop was on the verge of adding simple grooves to its previously smooth tyres, Continental just pipped it (and other tyre makers) to the post. A Dunlop ad of 1906 read: "This is the NON-SLIPPING DUNLOP TYRE you've heard so much about." But three years earlier a Continental newspaper advert tempted visitors to the German motor show in Frankfurt with: "The 100mm pneumatic tire fits 85 and 90mm rims. The 125mm pneumatic tire fits 120mm rims. Both tyre types are available in smooth and anti-slip versions."

Back then, the simple 'anti-slip' grooves, longitudinal in the case of the German manufacturer and transverse for Dunlop, were cut by hand, but these days tread patterns are a lot more complex. Some tread patterns may look like a fairly random arrangement of grooves and chunks of rubber, while others are more ordered, but they are all meticulously engineered to serve a purpose and all have similar features and components.

They all have blocks, which are the protruding parts of the tread in contact with the surface, and it's the sharp edges of these blocks that play a major part in generating grip.

Grooves are the spaces between the blocks, and they channel water away and may be arranged in different directions. Multiple cross-grooves complement the main grooves around the tyre's circumference. Ribs are solid circumferential bands giving stability and sharp steering, but perhaps the cleverest features are the sipes, fine slits in the blocks whose role is to improve the flexibility of the tread. Each sipe creates more edges, which increases grip, while complex three-dimensional sipes in snow tyres trap snow to, surprisingly perhaps, grip packed snow and ice on the road surface (snow sticks very well to snow – think making a snowball or snowman).

This overlooked, 120-year-old technology is fiendishly complex, and it's why computer-aided design and simulation plays such a big part in improving performance. Tyre developers come up with the technical structure comprising the elements, then industrial designers create a distinctive pattern – because appearance matters, too. AI is becoming important because, looking beyond the hype over what it can and can't do, it is particularly good at analysing vast amounts of data in a level of detail that often wasn't possible before. In this case, its use to optimise tread patterns in the virtual world before a test tyre is made should prove invaluable and, hopefully, lead to better performance and grip.



FRESH LOOK FOR BIGGER, MORE PRACTICAL CX-5

Mazda adds size, space and new tech to its third-generation SUV

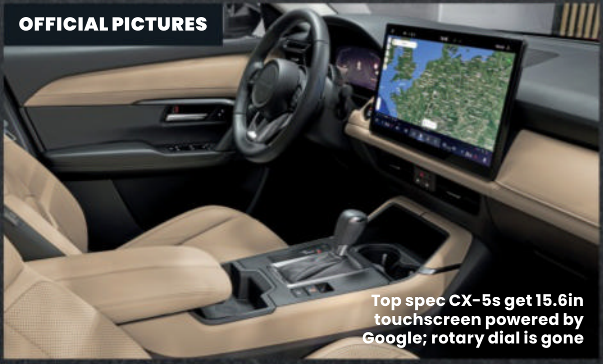
The Mazda CX-5 has grown for its third generation, bringing more space and new family-focused elements and introducing an array of features that are set to be rolled out across the rest of the Japanese firm's line-up.

The CX-5 remains a chunky SUV aimed squarely at young families. Mazda has tweaked the design and increased the size of what the firm calls its "most important global model" – more than 4.7 million units have been sold since its 2011 launch – in a bid to further widen the car's appeal and make it easier to live with.

The new CX-5 is 4690mm long, 1860mm wide and 1695mm tall, making it slightly larger than the car it replaces, but Mazda says it's the 115mm of extra wheelbase length that significantly improves the model's roominess, especially in the back.

The effort to improve usability can also be seen in some clever packaging tweaks. The rear doors have been rehinged so they can now be opened wider to help make it easier to fit child car seats and to buckle in children, while the bootlid lifts higher and the loading lip is lower so bigger and heavier items are easier to get in and out. Boot space has been increased by 61 litres to 583 litres, trumping rivals such as the Honda CR-V (579 litres).

OFFICIAL PICTURES



Top spec CX-5s get 15.6in touchscreen powered by Google; rotary dial is gone

MAZDA
MAZDA CX-5

CX-5 is wider and taller and has a wheelbase that's 115mm longer

One key addition to the CX-5 is up front, where a new 15.6in Google-powered infotainment touchscreen makes its debut (a smaller 12.9in display is used in base trims). Most notably, the new set-up means Mazda has ditched physical climate controls and removed the long-standing selection and volume dial.

This change was requested by owners, said technology research boss Christian Schultze, and according to him is a "big improvement" over what Mazda currently offers.

"The dial offered limited functionality," he said. "It was good for volume and simple functions but was harder when more complex operations were called for."

Schultze explained that calls for customisation – for example, the ability to add widgets to the home screen – was another reason why Mazda made the change and another key request by owners. "Customers are crazy for that," he said.

The first Mazda screen to be powered by Google – the system is already used by Renault, Volvo and Polestar, among others – features maps and apps similar to those found on Android phones. The screen is able to run Android Auto and Apple CarPlay wirelessly, too. It is paired with a 10.25in driver's display that can also connect to certain Google apps, such as Maps.

The removal of the dial has freed up space on the centre console, so a wireless charging pad has been introduced. This new interior set-up will be rolled out across the rest of the range, confirmed European design director Jo Stenuit.

The new CX-5 builds on Mazda's Kodo design language that began with the second-generation SUV in 2012. The new CX-5 has a noticeably longer nose and is raised by 15mm, which gives it "a much better stance", said Stenuit.

Power across the range comes from Mazda's 139bhp 2.5-litre e-Skyactiv G hybridised petrol engine – as used by the Mazda 3 and CX-30. This replaces the previous car's 2.0-litre and 2.5-litre petrol and 2.2-litre diesel units. As before, an all-wheel-drive option will be available. Mazda has also tweaked the CX-5's steering and suspension in an attempt to reduce driver fatigue on longer journeys.

The new CX-5 will be priced from around £30,000 – similar to the previous car. Deliveries will begin later this year.

WILL RIMELL

OFFICIAL PICTURES

MASERATI'S NEW-LOOK MC20 RENAMED MCPURA

THE MASERATI MC20 supercar has a new look and a new name: MCPura.

Modena has subtly refreshed the design of its five-year-old V6 flagship to keep it up to date with newer rivals such as the McLaren Artura.

Revealed at the Goodwood Festival of Speed, the supercar has a new badge that reflects its 'pure' character. Maserati said: "We have achieved energy in its purest form: pure speed, pure luxury and pure Italian passion."

While the Artura and the Ferrari 296 use V6 plug-in hybrid powertrains, the MCPura remains a combustion-only proposition, with its 3.0-litre 'Nettuno' engine sending 621bhp and 531lb ft to the rear axle. Maserati claims a 0-62mph time of 2.9sec and said the MCPura will go from rest to 186mph in just 8.8sec.

There are no significant mechanical changes, but the MCPura has a new front end with a reshaped grille and diffuser modelled on the hardcore MCXtrema track car, while a cleaner diffuser design at the rear remains in keeping with the broadly understated styling – an attribute that designer Klaus Busse said has been at the heart of the MC20's appeal.

"Its design is not decorative," he said. "It's purposeful."

Meanwhile, there is a new twin-spoke wheel design reminiscent of those fitted to the 1953 Maserati A6GCS. There are also subtle updates to the cabin, which now makes much more liberal use of Alcantara and features a new steering wheel inspired by that used in the MC20 GT2 racer.

Maserati says the MCPura will not be limited in production, but emphasises that it will be built to order.

Production begins in September, and pricing is expected to start above the MC20's £230,000 entry point.

New wheel design is inspired by A6GCS

Steering wheel is based on MC20 GT2 racer's

ELECTRIC MASERATIS TO GET LONGER RANGE

Maserati will launch extended-range versions of its Grecale crossover and Granturismo sports car later this year, as part of a push to keep developing and improving its EV offering.

The Italian firm launched its first two EVs in 2024, and was due to introduce an electric Quattroporte this year, but this has been delayed until later in the decade due to declining demand for premium electric cars.

Instead, engineering boss Davide Danesin said improving existing EVs and driving uptake is the priority.

"We developed great technologies in the past years for electrification, and I think many of them are going to last," he said. "We are still developing our battery-electric vehicles to improve performance."

Danesin did not disclose any details of these extended-range EVs. The Grecale Folgore is currently offered with a 105kWh battery that returns a 311-mile range, while the electric Granturismo's 83kWh pack achieves 280 miles.

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Reynolds laid out the government's industrial strategy at SMMT Summit

THREE MONTHS AGO, Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders boss Mike Hawes said it "felt like you were being punched on all sides". But the government's new UK Modern Industrial Strategy is one of a number of developments that makes Hawes "a bit more optimistic" about the future.

An automotive-specific trade deal with the Trump administration – the only one signed and in force of its kind in the world – is another reason for hope. People have even stopped asking him about Brexit…

Hawes credits this government, and in particular business secretary Jonathan Reynolds, for giving meaningful support to the industry. To that end, it is "encouraging" that there are references to the automotive industry "liberally sprinkled" throughout the strategy, which was announced at Horiba MIRA the day before Hawes's SMMT Summit, in a further sign of automotive's importance.

The government's strategy is both to attract inward investment and ensure cross-government support, making sure decisions are made with automotive in mind. Its 10-year length also makes for a more stable environment for investment. It confronts the UK's high energy costs, although cross-government support for UK competitiveness will no doubt be tested at some point to ensure savings here aren't undermined by making other areas more expensive, such as with labour costs going up due to recent national insurance hikes on employers.

In reference to the fading Brexit turmoil, Hawes said: "Despite everything going on globally, the UK is seen as being more stable than over the past decade."

One of the strategy's goals for UK car production is to get to 1.3 million units by 2035, almost 50% up on today. Hawes said that to do so will require "new entrants", most likely from China. A manufacturer looking to invest in the UK now has more reason to do so than before the strategy's publication.

The UK's diplomatic efforts with China, Europe and the US have led to better relationships across the board, keeping tariffs low and ensuring the UK can be a global export hub. The India trade deal could present opportunities, too.

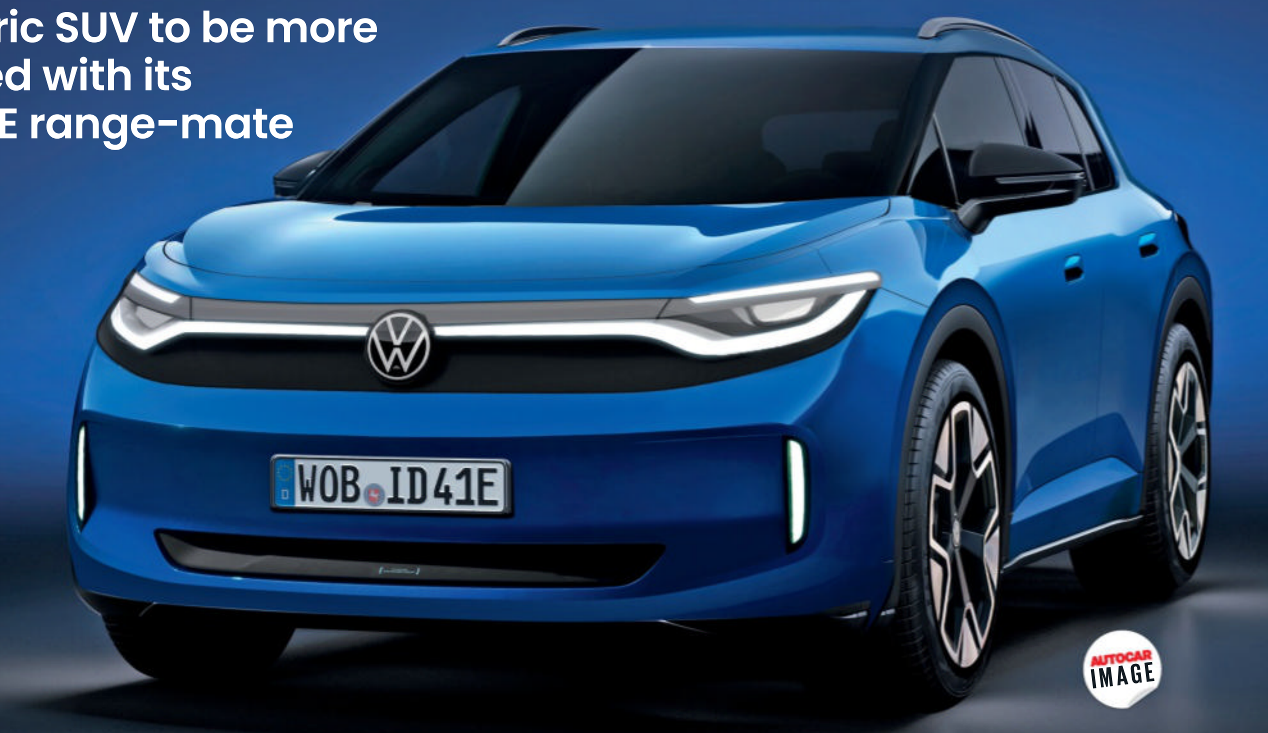
Hawes is well aware that attracting new investment is "fiercely competitive", while our domestic market's switch to EVs is lagging. He said substantive incentives that "make a difference to consumer sentiment and build the momentum you need" are required.

Yet the past few months have reassured Hawes there is a keen interest in cars, their technology and manufacturing. "The government, or the mainstream media, wouldn't give it that much attention if it didn't matter both politically and to individuals," he said. "It has a tremendous amount of relevance and importance to people."

"The UK is seen as being more stable than over the past decade"

UPDATED ID 4 SET FOR 'ELECTRIC TIGUAN' ROLE

Popular electric SUV to be more closely aligned with its big-selling ICE range-mate



Volkswagen will overhaul the ID 4 SUV so comprehensively next year that it will be more like a new generation than a facelift. The move is part of a drive to sustain the ID 4's strong sales figures and make it a more obvious EV equivalent to the Tiguan.

The ID 4, Volkswagen's second bespoke electric car after the closely related ID 3 hatchback, is approaching its fifth birthday, having been launched in 2020 as a crucial component of the firm's push to become a global leader in EV sales.

It quickly became one of the world's most popular EVs, and it remains an important part of Volkswagen's electric portfolio: it is currently Europe's fourth-best-selling electric car, between the ID 7 and ID 3, according to figures from industry analyst Jato Dynamics.

Now, at five years old, the Toyota bZ4X and Tesla Model Y rival is due an extensive round of design and technical updates to bring it into line with its newer stablemates.

Volkswagen CEO Thomas Schäfer said the new 2026 ID 4 is "really beautiful" and hinted at just how extensively it has been overhauled. "We'll redo the ID 4 completely inside and out," he said. "It will be a completely different car – a huge step up."

A major priority for the design overhaul is to ensure the ID 4 is visually related to the upcoming ID 1 city car and ID 2 supermini. "We felt it needed to fit in with the new design language going forward," said Schäfer. "It is still our most important electric vehicle in numbers. It is also to stay competitive for a while: let's [bring] a completely new one."

Speaking to Autocar previously, VW technical development boss Kai Grünitz confirmed that the ID 4 will receive fully revised interiors featuring physical buttons and knobs in place of digital display-based functions and the controversial slider element.

Autocar understands the new ID 4 is known internally as the 'electric Tiguan', hinting at a push to present the two similarly sized SUV models as more closely related siblings.

The company has not confirmed plans to go as far as changing the ID 4's name, but Schäfer has previously suggested that the Tiguan name would always have a place in Volkswagen's portfolio, even as the line-up goes all-electric. He said: "We've decided we're not going to throw away the traditional, successful names that have carried us for so long, that we've invested in for so long, like Golf and Tiguan. Why would you let them go?"

An electric Tiguan equivalent has long been understood to be part of VW's product roadmap, given that the ICE-powered car is the brand's most popular model globally. The electric version had been earmarked for a launch either this year or next year, which would coincide with the planned rollout for the upgraded ID 4.

FELIX PAGE

ID 4: VW's fourth-best-selling EV in Europe is set for an extensive overhaul

URUS EV ON HOLD AS LAMBO COMMITS TO NEXT-GEN PHEV

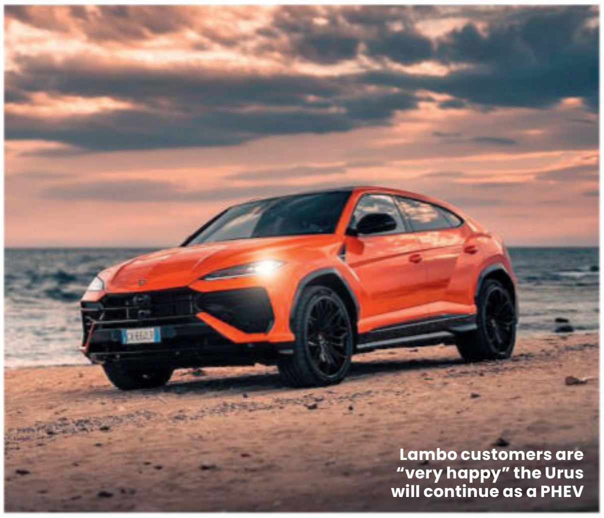
THE LAMBORGHINI URUS will continue as a plug-in hybrid for its next generation after the planned electric variant was pushed back to the middle of the next decade.

Speaking to Autocar, CEO Stephan Winkelmann attributed the decision to the unpredictability of ever-changing regulations – which may also delay the arrival of the firm's first EV, a production version of the Lanzador concept that is due to be launched in 2029. A decision on that car will be made at the start of 2026.

The Urus, Lamborghini's best-selling model, was set to go fully electric for its next generation before the end of the decade. That plan was announced when the Urus went hybrid-only last year, but Winkelmann has now confirmed it will instead continue in SE plug-in hybrid form for an all-new generation.

"We want to have a new generation again as a plug-in hybrid," he said. "This is something very important for us and for the customers. And they were very happy to hear about this."

Winkelmann suggested this model would arrive in 2029, with the electric variant pencilled in for 2035 – the year all new cars on sale in Europe will be required to produce zero tailpipe emissions.



Lambo customers are "very happy" the Urus will continue as a PHEV

MY WEEK IN CARS

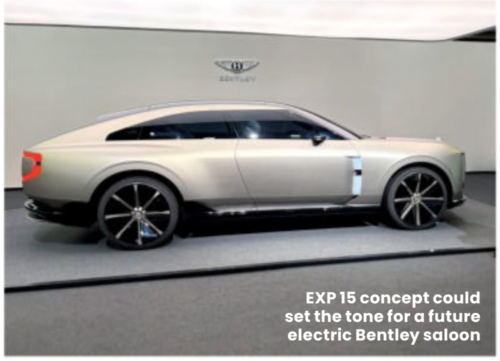
Steve Cropley

Cropley saw it all in Alpine's pit at Silverstone – except for one famous face (inset)

SATURDAY

A fascinating day at Silverstone watching qualifying for the British Grand Prix. I was a guest of Alpine, which turned out to be the golden ticket. Their French-run paddock base is a luxurious building, and so apparently permanent that you simply can't believe it will be dismantled and set up 1000 miles away in a week's time. It offered food and service to match any classy London restaurant, and wasn't even crowded. I was supposed to meet team 'consultant' Flavio Briatore but in the end all I saw was his back view.

The Alpine base was about 25 yards from the rear of the race pit, where we were allowed to watch key parts of qualifying, wearing earphones that carried the pit-to-car comms. Amazingly, we witnessed the critical moment when Pierre Gasly, who had been stuck at the back of the field, requested a radical wing change that "switched on" his tyres and promoted him from 18th to 10th. I met him for a short chat afterwards (affable guy), during which I couldn't resist that hoary old hack's question: how does it feel knowing this 1000-person team costing squillions depends entirely on you. No time to think, he answered. You're too busy doing your best.



EXP 15 concept could set the tone for a future electric Bentley saloon

"Don't bring me any more rough-arsed characters like that"

SUNDAY

I watched the chaotic rain-dominated race on the haunted fishtank at home, grateful that my visit had been on a nice, dry, cloud-protected Saturday. It's years since I've done a British GP: amazing that people still tolerate (and understand) the multiple, tortuous steps it takes to get from home to distant car park to remote entry gate to rammed vantage point. But their humour is relentlessly good.

I did Silverstone lots in the V10 era, and was surprised to find today's hybrids are so quiet. What will they be like next year, when the electric power proportion trebles, providing fully 50% of the total grunt?

TUESDAY

It was a wonderful visit to Bentley's new design studio, 26 years in the making, which now entirely occupies what for 85 years was the main HQ building. The whole massive interior has been repurposed; they've even put an open viewing area on the roof. If you were wondering whether ultra-luxury cars have a future, here's your answer.

There was special fascination for me, walking down a corridor I first visited in 1976 when it was the Rolls-Royce HQ (on assignment from Australia) to interview then chief Sir David Plastow. We had a good-natured argument about whether a Jag XJ12 was quieter than a Rolls Silver Shadow, and as I left he shouted down the corridor to my Rolls-Royce handlers: "Don't bring me any more rough-arsed characters like that..."

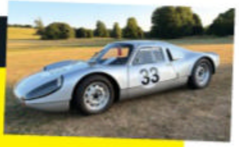
WEDNESDAY

The British Motor Museum, of which I am a trustee, has proudly announced the appointment of Peter Armstrong as its new CEO. Armstrong is a much-experienced Brit who has run one of America's foremost maritime museums, Mystic Seaport in Connecticut, for the past five years. Of the new job, he says: "Leading a museum that tells such an important British story and houses such a spectacular collection is a true honour."

FRIDAY

All week, people have been drawing comparisons between Bentley's freshly minted EXP 15 concept car and Jaguar's still-mysterious Type 00 concept, shown last year. There are similarities (long bonnet, fastback shape, super-luxurious intent), but Bentley people cheerfully deny the two are competitors. Their 'raised sedan' will never be built. Besides, it has different proportions and is intended, they say, to investigate the whole future of saloons. It has three seats, three doors and a thought-provoking suite of digitally enabled interior features that improve and simplify travel. Even so, Crewe must have known parallels would be drawn, and must be enjoying sharing their ideas in a refreshingly easygoing way.

AND ANOTHER THING



Porsche held a convivial pre-Goodwood gathering to mark 60 years of the 911 Targa, but my eye was drawn to this achingly beautiful 904 racer, one of just two with a flat-eight engine, and a Targa Florio winner. Road legal, too, which got my attention.

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

I've been following the online reaction to last week's unveiling of the Bentley EXP 15 concept car. Ever see something online and sigh and think that you know what the comments are going to be like? That's how I felt when I saw the studio pictures of the car.

I feel like I could have told them. And while I know that what people say on social media is not a true representation of what the public thinks, especially those who can afford a Bentley, there is enough 'Jaguar-lite' and 'yikes' sentiment to see that this is a challenging car.

Bentley must have known that, mustn't it? The EXP 15 is not set for production but that doesn't mean it won't inform the cars Bentley will make in future. The company has form here: remember the EXP 9 F from the 2012 Geneva motor show? It was not exactly a looker, was not widely gracefully received, and while not destined for production in that form, it did preview the Bentayga, which arrived looking even worse.

'Challenging' seems to be a word of the moment. Even Julian Thomson, the General Motors designer who has created some truly beautiful cars, used it in our interview with him last month. Designs, he thought, should challenge; although he works in an advanced design studio so he has more reason to believe that, and there's nothing ungainly about his studio's latest Corvette concept. But designers today do seem to like cars that are challenging. They like dissonance. Why?

Clearly it's a choice. Car designers know what beautiful is because they've studied it, and they're beautiful people with beautiful lives, houses, dogs and partners, and they can pull off wearing suits with trainers. When it comes to dating apps and sessions on Rightmove, are they swiping yes on ugly people and houses because they'd like to be challenged? Because it doesn't seem so.

DB9 looked beautiful back then and still does all these years later

So why the challenge when it comes to cars? Why should a car be difficult to look at?

An argument goes that you think a car is beautiful straight away and then over time its appeal will fade. It's too obviously pretty, or bland. But I'm not sure I buy this. Wasn't the Aston Martin DB9 immediately a stunner? To my eyes, it still is. Wasn't the Porsche Cayenne a gomper at birth? And I'm afraid I'd still swipe left if its mug appeared on Tinder.

Besides, isn't life challenging enough? Earlier today, I spent an hour typing one-handed on a train that had standing room only in its four (clearly too few) carriages. My motorbike insurance renewal was just offered to me with a 67% price hike, necessitating a drudge through comparison websites. The new policy documents tell me it will automatically renew, which I didn't ask for and was given no option to opt out of; remembering this will be another drain on my inadequate mental capacity. Four members of my family have been in hospital in the past three months. The road surface is failing outside my house. My local council has launched another survey about planning, which I will fill out, even while knowing the council will ignore the views of the majority of residents.

> **"Designers today like cars that are challenging. Why?"**

The book Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness introduces a theory called Sludge. It refers to any kind of friction that impedes your life: those hours you spend on hold to a call centre; the hidden fees; the small print; the appeals you must go through when you get an erroneous parking ticket (my family have had three in a year, all overturned when I've appealed them, but by gum it's tiring). I am an exceptionally fortunate man with an easy and comfortable life, good health, a loving family and a wonderful job. Yet even I can get exhausted by the system. The sludge.

This, clearly, is not a car designer's fault, but into this melee, this strife, why introduce *more* challenge when it could take us out of it? The good people at Morgan think of their cars as escapism, something to get us away from the toil, the ball-ache and the drama of life.

I appreciate that making a challenging-looking car doesn't stop people buying one, because Porsche's long-running best-seller illustrates that. But I'm tired of my eyes being challenged. I want them to light up like I've just seen a dog with its head poking out of a car window. What's so bad about making beautiful cars?

GET IN TOUCH
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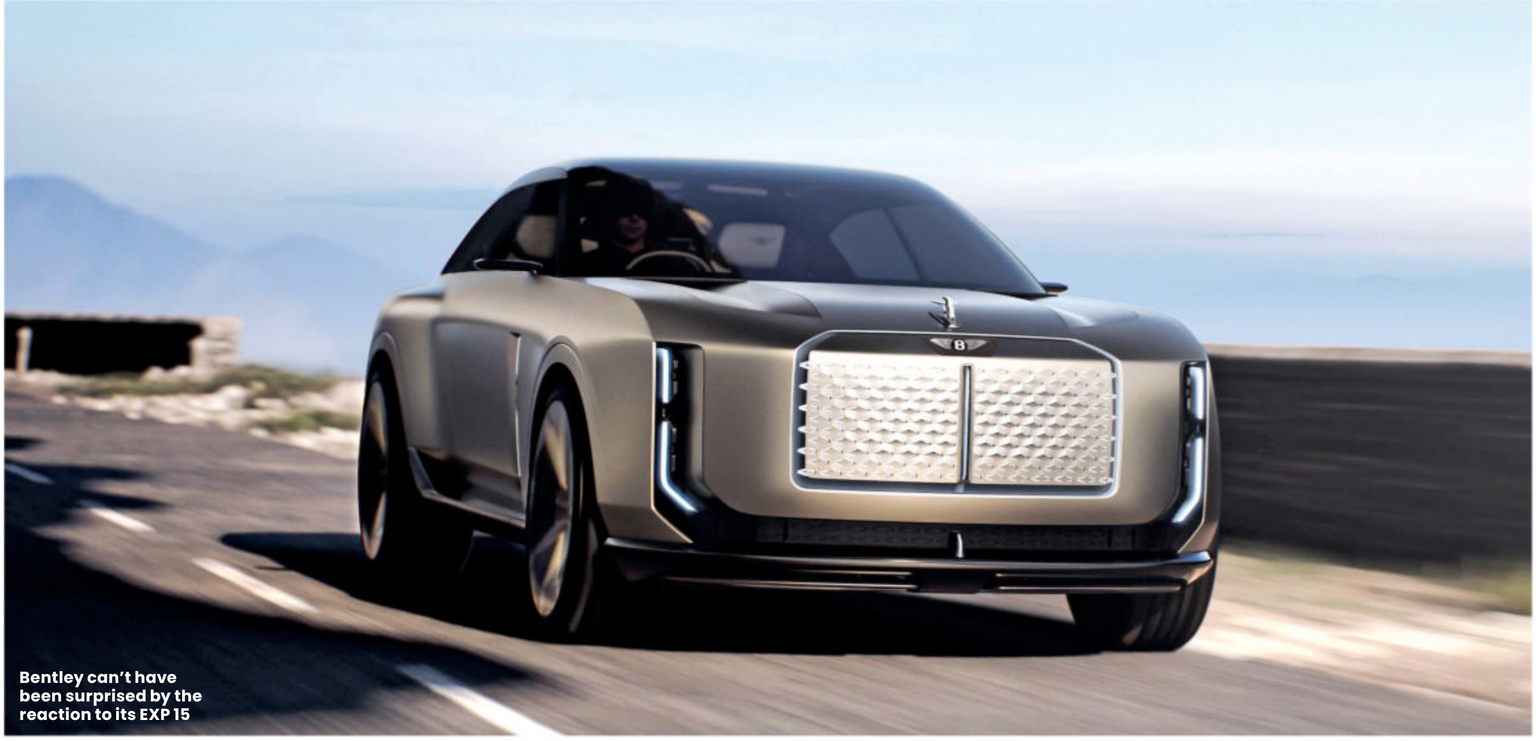


Bentley can't have been surprised by the reaction to its EXP 15

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Piastri's safety car gamesmanship cost him the Silverstone win

Twelve races done, 12 more to go. At the halfway mark of the Formula 1 season, Oscar Piastri leads McLaren team-mate Lando Norris in the world championship by just eight points. In their wake, Red Bull's Max Verstappen is an increasingly distant next-best, 69 points adrift of Piastri – which suggests F1 will almost certainly crown a new champion this year. It looks to be exclusively between the McLaren drivers, and given how equally matched they have proven so far in 2025, we should be in for a fascinating second half – along with a duel to rate against the best from the world championship's 75 years.

PIASTRI'S BRITISH GP GIFT

Piastri has been so impressive across the first 12 grands prix, having won five to Norris's four. But his signature mask of ice-cold serenity almost slipped at Silverstone, where he only had himself to blame for gifting Norris a cherished home win. Amid the rain and characteristic Silverstone chaos, an avoidable penalty cost Piastri a likely victory as his 'erratic' driving ahead of Verstappen before a safety car restart was deemed to have crossed the line of acceptability.

Two races earlier, in Canada, George Russell was made to sweat on whether he would keep his own hard-earned win after indulging in similar gamesmanship. In his case, Russell appeared to be baiting Verstappen into earning a penalty that would have resulted in a ban for the following Austrian GP. Piastri's intentions were probably less crafty, but he did brake twice as hard as Russell had in Montreal, and his sudden reduction in speed was more than 100mph. It was erratic and it was dangerous, and Piastri deserved a reprimand – despite his simmering fury at the call.

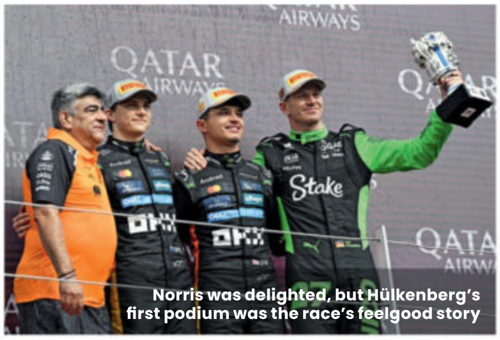
Getting the jump on a rival at a restart is a skill all racing drivers learn early. Once the safety car lights go out, it's the lead driver's prerogative to set the pace however they wish – but within reason. Russell and Piastri took overt and unnecessary risks in their restarts. Perhaps they were both wary that it was the aggressive Verstappen behind them. Whatever, Russell just about escaped censure, while Piastri paid a heavy price for making a meal of his tactics. So, lesson learned? You'd think so, wouldn't you?

> "Norris has now won in Monaco and at Silverstone"

RACE WINS VERSUS TITLES

In the wake of his narrow defeat of Piastri in Austria, Norris now has two on the bounce and probably won't care a jot that his British GP win was inherited via a penalty. He's the 13th British driver to win his home grand prix, and what it meant to him, as he closed his eyes and soaked in the moment on the podium, was all too obvious.

Norris has now won in Monaco and at Silverstone within the span of six weeks. He said this was "as good as it gets", but then added the caveat "apart from [winning] a world championship". On a weekend of celebrations to mark 75 years of F1's title bauble, I thought that was telling of how attitudes have changed over the decades. When Stirling Moss became the first British driver to win his home race in the post-war era, at Aintree in 1955, grand prix wins counted for more than world titles. They always did for Stirling, which is why his status as the greatest never to become champion never bothered him. "The world championship can spoil things because drivers spend more time trying to win it than actually trying to win the individual races," he said. "That, to me, is wrong. For me, the most important race is always today's. Today I could win, lose or get killed. What could be more important than that?"



Norris was delighted, but Hülkenberg's first podium was the race's feelgood story

HULKENBERG'S PODIUM JOY

Beyond the Piastri penalty chatter and Norris's home win, Nico Hülkenberg's first F1 podium at the 239th attempt was the feelgood story of the British GP and the one most universally enjoyed. I first met Hülkenberg after he won an A1GP race for Team Germany in China way back in 2006, when he was tipped by some as the next Michael Schumacher (they even shared the same manager). Funny how things worked out for a driver who has spent his F1 career mired in midfield cars. Removing that zero-podium monkey from his back, for a Sauber team that hadn't finished in the top three since 2012, is the least this popular racing driver deserves.

F1 MOVIE IS THE PITTS

Brad Pitt's new Formula 1 movie is a hit, having made more than $140 million at the box office from its opening weekend alone. Curious, I took my 10-year-old son to see it. His verdict? He loved it. My verdict? Ugh. But then, it's not for me, is it?

I'm glad Hollywood has embraced F1 and I'm glad I've seen it. I'll be equally glad if I never have to see, think about or write about it ever again.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

CITROEN SAFETY RECALL

Citroën C3s have had a safety recall. We have been told not to use our car as the airbag is unsafe. The garages in my town can't get the parts until October; in the next two towns, they can't get the parts until next year. I have found a place 60 miles away that can fix it, but we can't drive the car and they will not transport it there, nor give us a loan car or pay our transport expenses.

How are we supposed to take a car that we aren't allowed to drive? Citroën's helpline will not help.

Darren Leaning
Via email

Citroën UK said: "Our focus is on completing the replacement of airbags in affected vehicles as swiftly as possible. We are working hand in hand with our retailer network to maximise the number of vehicles we can repair every day. To increase our capacity further, work is ongoing to introduce airbag replacement sites at convenient locations, as well as repair-at-home options. It is inevitable, with such a large number of vehicles affected, that customers will be inconvenienced in the short term. However, we are deploying various options to support mobility, recognising that every driver will have individual requirements and that priority needs to be given to those with the most urgent needs. Customers should check if their vehicle is affected and if so should register it to enable the processing of their repair ASAP."

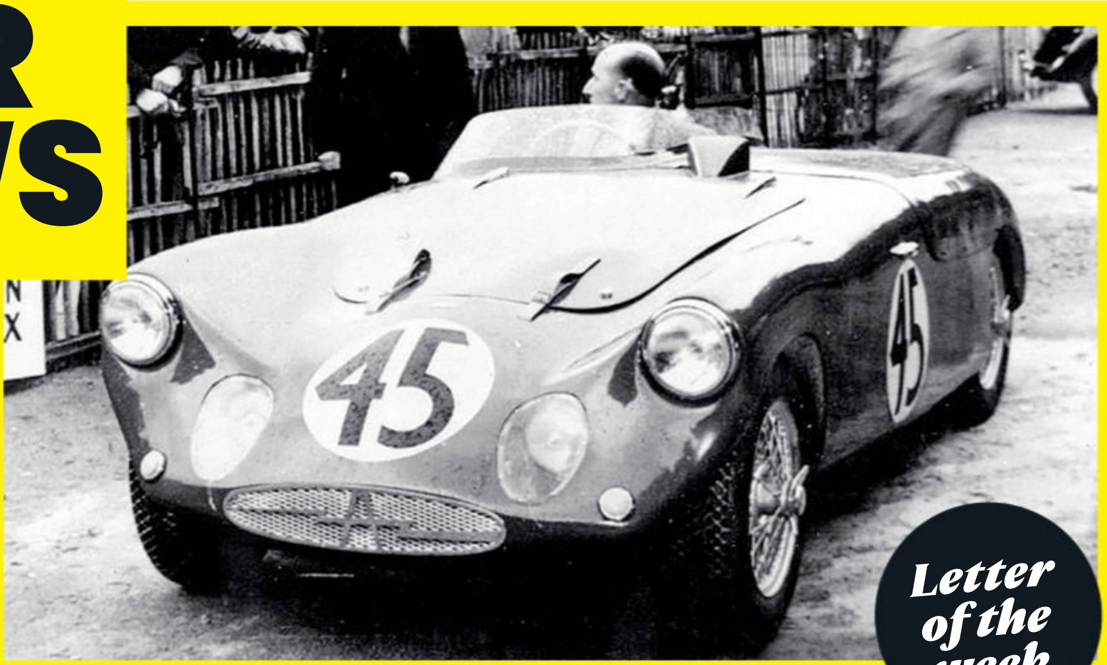
OUR KIAS DO WHAT!?

It was interesting to read the 'Key to brand loyalty' letter in the 25 June issue. I'll give you the opposite.

Last year, my wife and I went to pick up her top-of-the-range Sportage (£43k) from a Kia dealership. The first thing the chap said was: "I bet you're excited to pick up your Hyundai." No idea where that came from, as they don't sell Hyundais. He then asked why we hadn't ordered mats and mud flaps. I said because we hadn't been asked. Then the icing on the cake: we asked him how to move the car using the fob without being in the car, which was important in our buying decision, and he said: "It doesn't do that, does it?" Luckily a colleague of his overheard and showed us how to.

Needless to say the servicing will be done by a different Kia dealership and hopefully will make us want to be loyal, not disappointed.

Dave Brice
Downpatrick, County Down



Letter of the week

MEMORIES OF LE MANS

I was interested by your article on Arnott Racing Cars (Lost in the archive, 25 June). The company's chief engineer, George Thornton, was my father.

This image (above) is of Arnott's 1955 Le Mans car being driven to the circuit by my father. The number-one driver of the car was Jim Russell, later to run the eponymous racing driver school at Snetterton, whose alumni included one Emerson Fittipaldi, I believe. The original co-driver was to have been Ivor Bueb, but he was poached by 'Lofty' England (albeit with Daphne Arnott's agreement) to partner Mike Hawthorn in the Jaguar D-Type that eventually won that very sad race. Peter Taylor was very much a last-minute substitute; he had never driven the car before.

The car was repaired after being crashed at Le Mans; its glassfibre body was repainted red, fitted with a full windscreen, wipers and hood and used by Daphne as her personal transport for some years. The Coventry Climax 1100cc 'FPF' engine was also fitted with an Arnott supercharger (was it the only blown FPF?). I can vouch for the fact that it was quite quick! Both it and the 1957 Le Mans car eventually found their way to the US, and I believe both cars are still there.

The records that Arnott's streamlined record-breaker, a rebodied Formula 3 car, took at Montlhéry in October 1953 included some quite long-distance ones, including 500km at 108mph and three hours at 107.9mph, including fuel stops. It's possibly these that the car still holds, over 70 years later. It should be borne in mind that its 500cc Norton engine developed just under 50bhp! The car crashed at Montlhéry in 1954 while attempting some more records (I think for 750cc cars) and was a total wreck.

My father made a wooden scale model of the car, which I still have, along with a few photos, taken at the time, mostly by Daphne. This model was tested in the de Havilland Aircraft Company's wind tunnel at Hatfield. It is just over 45cm long, but I don't know what scale it is.

Derek Thornton, Bracknell, Berkshire

The only thing missing from the new Amalfi is a leaping cat, says Mike

Bob hopes "crazy attention-seeking" AMG concept doesn't make production

MY HOPELESS TOYOTA

It was interesting to read the views of fellow reader Tom Sheppard about his Aygo X (2 July).

Based on reputation and experience (I own a Toyota GR Yaris – fantastic!), I bought an Aygo X Air for my home in southern France. Four doors, great roof, Apple CarPlay, cruise control, good stereo, fantastic warranty, £20k: what's not to like? Well, the engine is feeble and married to a CVT that is constantly manic on anything other than a flat road in an effort to keep the car at normal driving speeds.

I understand how hard it must be to build a small car to a competitive price, and the Aygo X looked great on paper, but on the road it's hopeless. I'm kicking myself for not taking a more extensive test drive and relying on Toyota's reputation. I would have happily paid another £2500 for an adequate drivetrain, so I'm not sure that Toyota cut costs in the correct place with the Aygo X.

Paul Newman
Via email

COCKY SALESPEOPLE

The results of Citroën's survey of female car buyers (News, 18 June) prompted a few thoughts.

I used to be in car sales and quickly learned that if a couple were looking at a car, it was best to give as much (if not more) attention to the lady and find out her thoughts on the car; if she didn't like it, it was pretty much a given that I wouldn't be selling that car to them, so it was a complete waste of time trying. I would then ask her what she wanted and try to

Sportage really can park itself. Just ask any (well almost any) Kia dealer

show them a car that she would like.

A good car salesperson adapts to each individual customer and qualifies their wants and needs and makes them feel comfortable.

I worked with many cocky salespeople who ended up being crap at the job.

Mike Oliver
Via Facebook

SHOWROOM SEXISM

I was appalled at the way car salesmen spoke to my wife when she was buying a car. She simply elected not to buy the car when she was treated so badly. She finally bought a Volkswagen Up from a member of the human race who treated her as a real person. She ended up buying two more cars from the same salesman.

Michael Bushell
Via Facebook

COULDN'T GIVE A XX

If that orange throwback, the AMG GT XX concept (News, 2 July), is Mercedes' future, they have a problem. Ugly front grille, no rear window, electric silly speed: everything no motorist asked for. Let's hope production cars remain swift, comfortable and smart-looking, not crazy attention-seekers.

Bob Bull
Via email

I WISH IT WERE A JAG

I've just been browsing through the 2 July issue of Autocar and was struck by the looks of the new Ferrari Amalfi. Wow, what a belter!

It's such a pity that Jaguar couldn't come up with a design like that. It bears all their hallmarks.

Sadly, having been a Jaguar owner for many years, its current new concept just doesn't appeal – neither does that vital loss of heritage.

Mike Rees
Cardiff

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 23 JULY

FEATURE

ASTON vs FERRARI vs McLAREN

An open championship tussle with a difference: Aston's latest Vantage Roadster takes on drop-top versions of the Roma and the Artura

INSIGHT

WHY STEEL IS MAKING A COMEBACK

We uncover the sometimes surprising reasons behind its revival

ROAD TEST

MG S5: STILL WANT THAT KIA EV3?

New electric crossover is given no place to hide from our road testers

EVERY WEEK

MY CAR & I

HUMVEE

What's it like to drive and own a go-anywhere military behemoth?

LIVING WITH A...

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE

Right-sized, classy PHEV joins our fleet with plenty to prove

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FIRST DRIVES

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 1.7.25, MISANO, ITALY **ON SALE** NOVEMBER

FERRARI F80

Maranello lets it all hang out with a limited-run technical tour de force that follows in the footsteps of its Le Mans-winning hypercar

The F80 is the Ferrari that's too fast for Fiorano. It's the latest limited-run, extreme-performance Ferrari of the kind that appears once a decade, a lineage featuring the GTO (aka 288), F40, F50, Enzo and LaFerrari, and it is the first that hasn't been demonstrated at Ferrari's home test track.

Instead it was presented at Misano, a wider and longer circuit than Fiorano and more suitable for a car with the F80's astonishing performance.

Misano is popular with motorcycle racers and looked as expansive as Silverstone on the video I watched of an Audi R8 GT3 lapping it. The F80's speed made it feel about half the size in reality.

To the details first, though. The F80's development timeline almost mirrors that of the 499P Le Mans-winning race car. The two are different – this is not a road-going racer – but there are similarities both in ethos and with some mechanicals.

The F80 has a two-seat carbonfibre passenger tub, 5% lighter but 50% stiffer than a LaFerrari's (the next most recent special), with the passenger slightly offset behind the driver so they don't bang shoulders in a cabin that's 50mm narrower. The supportive driver's seat adjusts, the passenger's pads don't.

At the front and rear are mostly extruded aluminium subframes, from which hangs double-wishbone suspension all round, ▶

TESTER'S NOTE
Driver's door has a fabric loop so you can reach to pull it closed wearing (optional) harnesses. If the passenger door has it on production models, you can thank me for suggesting it. **MP**

◂ with 3D-printed upper wishbones and active Multimatic spring and damper units similar to those that made their Ferrari debut in the Purosangue, mounted horizontally to maintain a low centre of gravity. As well as having adjustable damping, they extend or withdraw to control pitch and roll, so there are no separate anti-roll bars.

The car is 4.84m long, 2.06m wide and just 1.14m high, and it has a 2.67m wheelbase. It comes with carbonfibre wheels as standard (you can buy forged alloys to supplement them), wearing 285/30 R20 front and 345/30 R21 rear tyres, either Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2s or stickier Cup 2Rs. Brake discs are a new carbon-ceramic material, 408mm in diameter at the front, 309mm at the rear.

In the car's middle is the latest iteration of Ferrari's 3.0-litre, 120deg V6, which made its debut in the 296 GTB and also powers Ferrari's Le Mans challenger. But it has been tweaked here to levels not even found in the 499P.

More than 200 components have been changed over the 296's version of this engine, so it makes 888bhp at 8750rpm – Ferrari's meteoric target of 300 metric horsepower per litre.

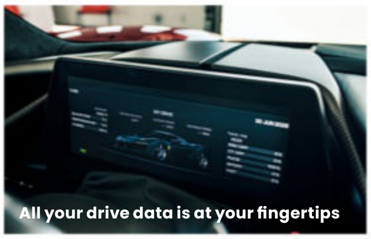
Its two in-vee turbochargers also include a small electric motor to get them spinning quickly rather than waiting for the boost (which I think technically also makes them electric superchargers, but we know what an e-turbo means).

The V6 engine is supplemented by an 80bhp crank-mounted electric motor, sited beside the engine so there's only 100mm between the crank centre and the bottom of the sump, in turn meaning the engine can be mounted much lower. The top of it is about knee height.

This all drives through an eight-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox with no reverse. At the front is an e-axle with two electric motors of 141bhp each (they do the reversing), and when everything is firing at once the total system output is 1184bhp (or 1200 continental horses).

This, it's fair to say, is not a hybrid system designed for economy; it's "for performance and nothing else", according to Stefano Varisco, Ferrari's manager of dynamics and energetics. The battery, which sits crosswise just behind the passenger cell, is only 2.3kWh. If you tried, and there's a Qualifying mode in which you can, the car will

The F80's aero can be felt making a real difference in fast corners on track



All your drive data is at your fingertips

Wheels are carbonfibre as standard

> **“If you record a hot lap, the car decides for itself when to boost the motors for a fast time”**

Raised-leg driving position aids underbody aero; flavour of steering wheel is unknown

flatten the battery within a lap.

Then there are the F80’s aerodynamics. Three bargeboards split air at the front and direct it either over the top of the car or underneath to a diffuser that, at 1.8m long, constitutes more than half of the underbody. There’s a rear wing that raises by 200mm and rotates through a 22deg angle. In total, at 155mph the F80 makes 1050kg of downforce, split 460kg front and 590kg rear, which is twice as much overall as LaFerrari.

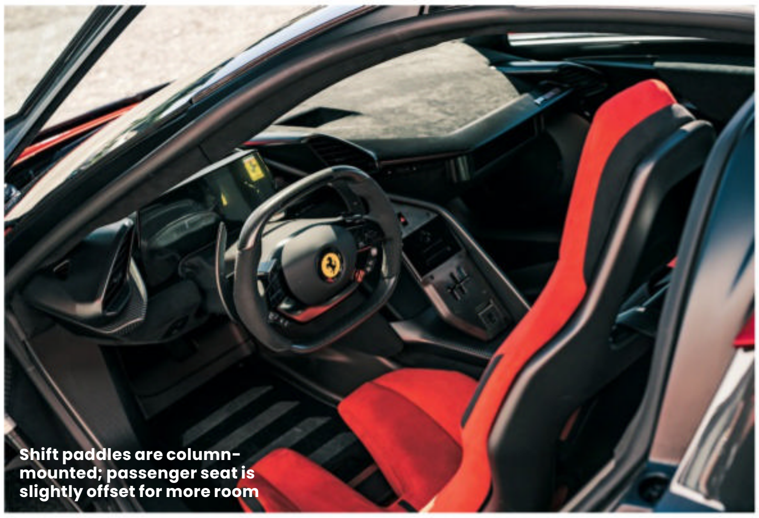
You don’t get a choice about which aero mode it’s in. The car can easily predict what’s best, and apparently “it’s not so nice” if available downforce disappears mid-corner. The engine is canted 1.2deg upwards to the rear, to give the diffuser more room to work.

Stitching all of this together is what must be some heinously complex software and subsequent tuning. There’s no rear-steer, but there is torque vectoring via braking on both axles, plus a rear electronically controlled limited-slip differential and yet another iteration of ‘slide slip control’. Braking is by-wire, with regeneration from all three electric motors, including from the crank-mounted motor which can drag on the engine as a form of traction control. Should you opt to record yourself over a hot lap, the car will decide for itself when it would be best to boost the motors to give you as fast a time as possible.

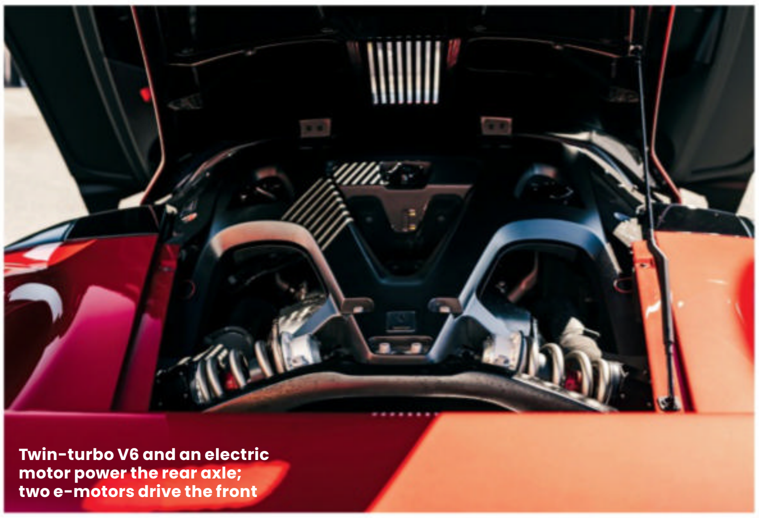
If all of this sounds very nuanced and complicated, given that Ferrari has a V12 that could more easily blow customers’ minds, you would be right. And if it had used it, Ferrari would have had “very happy” customers, according to Matteo Turconi, Ferrari’s senior product marketing manager. “But we’d have lost a lot of aerodynamic efficiency.”

The V12 is a big engine and eminently charismatic, but Turconi says Ferrari has stopped using it for the “top-performing” cars: “We have to be honest to our heritage. This is the best car.” Should best be in air quotes? There is a good argument that the F80 is true to Ferrari’s heritage. Each of the previous specials has a link, of sorts, to Ferrari’s motorsport stars of the time (see separate story, p25).

But the decision to run a hybrid V6 shows a continued commitment to electrification, a willingness to make a nuanced performance car and even, perhaps, a little bravery. Electrically assisted sports cars ▸

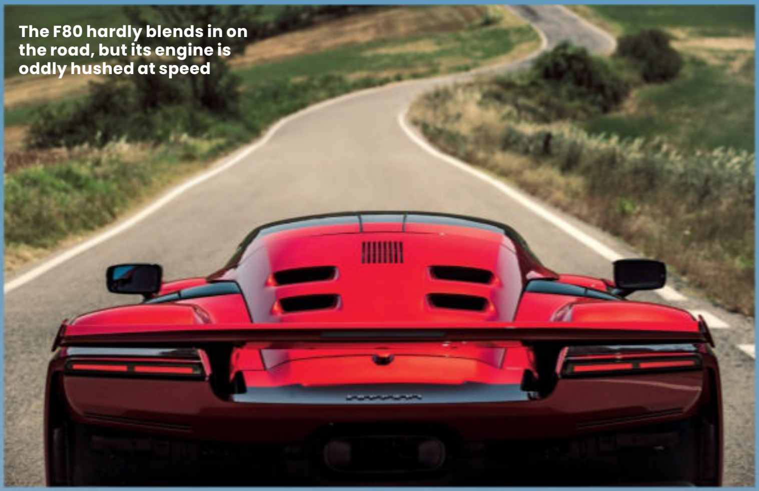


Shift paddles are column-mounted; passenger seat is slightly offset for more room



Twin-turbo V6 and an electric motor power the rear axle; two e-motors drive the front

Rear wing adjusts for height and angle, contributing to 1050kg of downforce at 155mph



The F80 hardly blends in on the road, but its engine is oddly hushed at speed

◂ are the flavour of another month. Ferrari has to sell 799 F80s and they're €3.1 million a pop before local taxes. If it hits the spot it could boost the allure of the hybridised SF90 and 296; miss, though, and it's another sports car that carried more cables and fewer cylinders than it should have. I wonder if there are more than just 799 F80s riding on how it performs. Lapping 5.0sec faster than a LaFerrari around Fiorano is one achievement; making you buy it is a different one.

The interior is excellent. Buttons are back, the driving position raises your legs so that air can pass beneath the tub and the steering wheel pulls so close you could almost lick it. It's heavily squared but entirely in keeping with the Le Mans-adjacent view out. Paddles are still attached to the column, which usually I like in Ferraris, but here it feels like they would be better on the wheel.

Our first go is on track. The first thing of note is that this car is extraordinarily, rocket-ship fast. With motors helping spin the turbos and boost low-rev torque gaps, there is no turbo lag. The engine, regardless of whether you're at the 900rpm idle or near the 9200rpm rev limit, surges. There are no Bugatti-like delays while it takes a breath. It's more like a McLaren P1 or Artura, or a 296 GTB, but more so in its immediate punch forwards. Ferrari's numbers say it will go from 0-62mph in 2.15sec, but rather more significant is the 5.75sec 124mph time: LaFerrari took 6.9sec.

Ferrari's gearshifts (and the paddles that make them) are usually the best in the business, and there's no exception here. Upshifts are immediate, downshifts impeccable. The engine, a variant of the 'piccolino V12' – a six that is meant to sound as good as one with twice the cylinders – is engaging, although it headbutts the rev limiter with alarming ease. I don't mean that as a criticism. I just feel clumsy, until better drivers than me say they repeatedly do the same.

What's odd is how quiet the car is from the outside. Towards the end of the pit straight, where the car must be pulling 140mph, all you hear is the whoosh – vast quantities of air moving, like a fast jet entering the Mach Loop, according to photographer Jack Harrison. At least that will make it easy to adhere to track-day noise limits.

There is a very fast corner at Misano. "It doesn't look like a corner on the track map," they say in the briefing, "but when you get there, it is." Even I can feel the aerodynamics working as I take it faster than I feel I should.

Pitch, dive, roll: all are brilliantly contained. Just a little of each is allowed, for feel, to lean against. With this suspension it would be possible to tilt the car into a corner, which would feel weird. Bump absorption is first-class.

The steering is medium-weighted and consistent, and although it's only two turns between locks, as Ferraris seem to be, it is linearly responsive and neither nervy nor over-sensitive.

Lower-speed corners need less

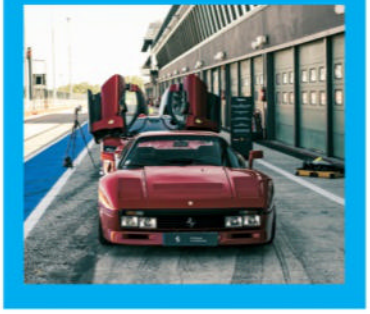
"It adopts a benign slide, until the front axle pulls it straight because it would like to accelerate, thank you"

Three-way adjustable dampers mean the F80 rides well on bumpy roads, too

HERITAGE OR SIGN OF THE TIMES?

Ferrari would say that using a hybrid V6 is in sync with what it is doing in motorsport now, and that all of its previous specials did the same. You could argue it's choosing facts to suit the argument, but it's true that the turbocharged V8 (288) GTO of 1984 arrived in Formula 1's turbo era, which was still just about around when the F40 arrived in 1987. The 1995 F50 did genuinely use a V12 derived from F1, while in 2002 the Enzo's V12 was at least naturally aspirated, although F1 had moved to V10s at the time. The 2013 LaFerrari introduced some electrification when F1 had KERS.

So squint a bit and the argument just about holds, but my feeling is they've gone for a hybrid because it suits the current ethos, not because it continues the heritage.



faith than aero-heavy ones, but this car likes precision. Brake feel is brilliant on corner approach, and you can detect something, somewhere easing back an inside wheel to help it turn, but it's not an open-book hoon machine like other Ferraris. It wants to put power to the front wheels, wants you to ease open the steering and get it into a straight line, because that way is fastest. And it likes going fast.

Still, if you do turn all the assistance off, it will move around. There's a touch of steady-state understeer as you begin to turn, but it boosts through that easily and adopts a benign slide, until I think the front axle decides it has had enough of this and starts to pull it back straight because it would like to accelerate, thank you. So while it will slide – unlike, say, a Ferrari F8 Tributo – that's not its natural state.

If it feels like anything else I've driven, it reminded me of an Audi R10 TDI Le Mans prototype. They share a snug high-foot driving position, precise medium-weighted controls, a steering wheel on which your hands never leave the 2:45 position and immersive and unburstable but perhaps undramatic performance. At eight-tenths effort, an F80 will go twelve-tenths faster than almost any other production car. It's a brilliant car, but it's the performance and the capability rather than the drama that impresses.

Given all of that, I don't expect it to be a great road car, but it surprises me. Ferraris tend to ride well and, with three damper settings, the F80 eases over even the gnarliest surfaces. I remain aware of, but not daunted by, its width. And it's more hospitable than, say, a McLaren F1 or GMA T50, which seat their passengers further behind the driver. This gives just enough space to clear shoulders while leaving it easy to chat across the cabin, so it is a sociable car, too.

There's only a tiny amount of luggage space behind the occupants' heads, mind. Enough for 24 hours, they say. But whether on the road or, like its 499P stablemate, on track, the F80 feels ready for both. It may not be the most dramatic Ferrari, but I think it is the 'right' one.

MATT PRIOR

Luggage space is limited, but the F80 is comfortable for two

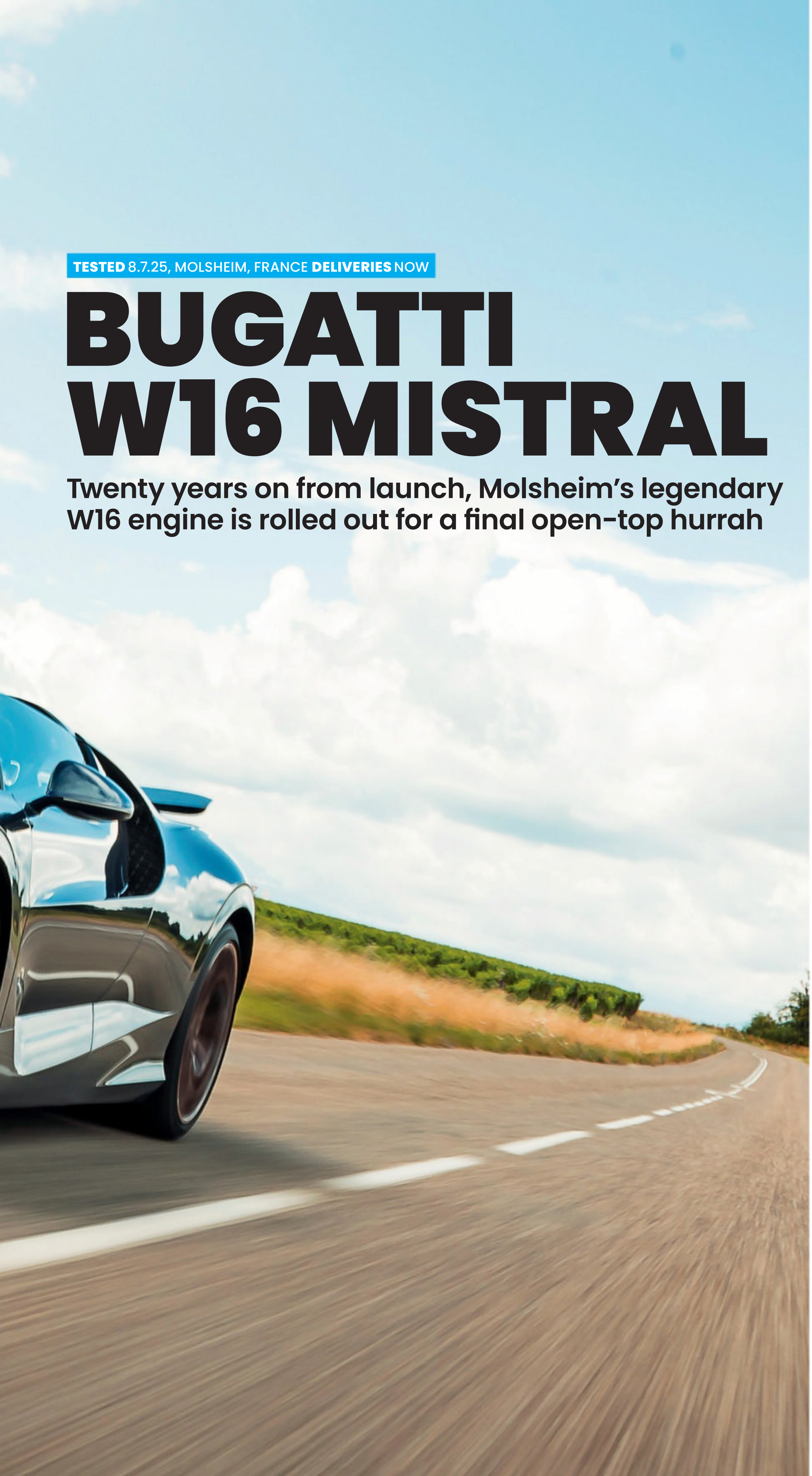
TECH SPEC

FERRARI F80

One of the less dramatic Ferrari specials but easily the fastest and most capable

Price £3,200,000 (approx)
Engine V6, 2992cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus three electric motors
Power 1184bhp (engine: 888bhp at 8750rpm)
Torque na (engine: 627lb ft at 5500rpm)
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD
Dry weight 1525kg
0-62mph 2.2sec
Top speed 217mph
Economy 20.9mpg
CO_2, tax band 307g/km, 37%
Rivals Aston Martin Valkyrie, McLaren W1, Mercedes-AMG One

BUGATTI
W-386-DB
F
67



TESTED 8.7.25, MOLSHEIM, FRANCE **DELIVERIES** NOW

BUGATTI W16 MISTRAL

Twenty years on from launch, Molsheim's legendary W16 engine is rolled out for a final open-top hurrah

All engines make some noises. If you're lucky they make noises you'd consider welcome, but most of them only make a couple of different types of noise – and it's not like you have a great deal of control over what they are.

The Ferrari F80 (on p20) makes sounds that are pleasing from the inside; from the outside it's almost inaudible. The other day I drove a Porsche 911 restomod, coming to these pages soon, which made one of the greatest overrun sounds I've ever heard. But it was the same noise over and again.

The W16 Mistral is the final outing for Bugatti's W16 engine after 20 years in production, and I think I counted at least six distinctly different sounds. And if you time it just right, or get your throttle position just so, you can actually pick and choose the ones you want to hear: you can lightly accelerate to get a significant turbo whistle; at around 2000rpm on a steady throttle there's a really pleasing offbeat induction gurgle; and on lift-off from heavy acceleration there are some very amusing whooshes, like you've just catastrophically punctured a bouncy castle.

But the most spectacular thing happens when all of these accelerative sounds are playing together – a W16 tutti, if you will – as you accelerate from 3000rpm and the pathways to the second pair of this engine's four turbochargers are finally allowed to crack open (they remain off limits at lower revs in order to reduce turbo lag).

Do you see those two inlets, above and behind the driver's and passenger's heads? Those are the engine's air intakes. This 8.0-litre, 1578bhp engine ingests so much air on full throttle that you can feel the pressure change in your ears. It's not loud in the wailing sense; it just feels whoppingly powerful. Sure, you're aware that fuel is being burnt behind you. But you're more aware of the amount of the Earth's atmosphere the engine is wolfing ▸

W16 engine plays to its own tune, for the enjoyment of the Mistral's occupants

“Some drive modes can change the car’s angle of attack should you want to do a high-speed run”

TESTER’S NOTE
There’s no touchscreen. If you want sounds, you pair your phone and use its controls, then steering wheel shortcuts. **MP**

◂ down around your head as the car sucks in whatever is closest to it.

Apparently the roof – an emergency fabric job that they don’t recommend for use above 100mph – sits above these air inlets. With it in place, I wouldn’t be surprised if the W16 ingested receipts and jelly babies from the cabin as it gulped air on full throttle.

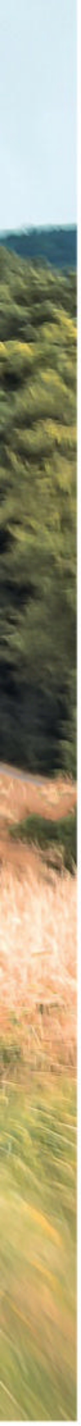
The W16 Mistral, then, is a fitting end for an engine that made its debut in the 2005 Veyron, back when the Volkswagen Group had its hand on the tiller and Ferdinand Piëch’s decadent hubris had him setting new standards and breaking records that nobody else would ever be inclined to approach.

He wanted a car that was as easy to drive as a Volkswagen Golf, met or exceeded VW’s existing or newly created quality and durability standards and, at the same time, you could climb into at the start of one of the straights at VW’s Ehra-Lessien test track and be doing 253mph by the end of it.

He and his boffins specified a W16 engine to do it. Four banks of four cylinders, eight litres in total, four turbochargers and a four-figure horsepower number when such things were unheard of at the time. The Veyron’s W16 made 1001 metric horsepower – 987bhp – and it only went north from there. Faster versions since have knocked off various round metric horsepower milestones to end up, here, with 1578bhp – a round 1600PS and the same as a Chiron Super Sport 300+.

The Mistral, having no roof, won’t do the 300mph-plus of the Super Sport, and given that Bugatti is now part of Bugatti Rimac, it no longer has access to VW’s Ehra-Lessien for its high-speed runs either – which is a bit confusing given that Porsche’s stake in Bugatti’s ownership structure still seems relatively Volkswagen-adjacent.

The Mistral has a fabric roof, but it’s only for sub-100mph emergencies



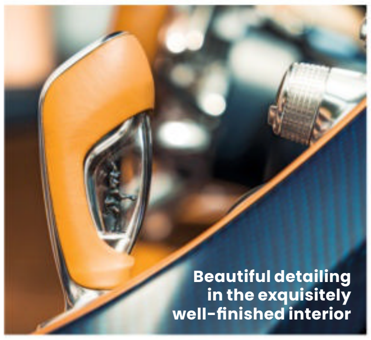
Top-tier luxury finish in the Mistral's cabin. Note absence of touchscreen

BUGATTI'S NEW NEW ERA

Bugatti's early 2000s revival came under Volkswagen Group ownership, with Ferdinand Piëch at the helm and willing to invest whatever it took to get the Veyron and, later on, the Chiron into the record books. The company produced a lot of speed and a relatively large number of cars but not a lot of money. More recent VW Group bosses, with costs under tighter pressure, viewed Bugatti as something of a liability.

In 2021, then, Bugatti Rimac was founded, 45% owned by Porsche and 55% owned by Croatia's Rimac Group. Under that arrangement, Autocar Issigonis Trophy winner Mate Rimac has a 37% shareholding, Porsche has 24%, Hyundai 12% and other investors 27%.

The new Bugatti wants to keep tighter controls on development spending for the upcoming V16 Tourbillon, and it wants to manufacture the cars more quickly when they arrive, so customers don't have to wait so long – a situation that sometimes causes frustrations today.



Beautiful detailing in the exquisitely well-finished interior

Mistral is named after a fierce French wind, appropriately enough

Seats have a racing bucket look but are comfy and supportive

But at Papenburg test track last year Andy Wallace took a Mistral to 282mph, as fast as an open-topped production car has gone.

Other car companies, mostly smaller ones, have vied to take the 'world's fastest production car' tag away from Bugatti over the years, and the list of outright fastest cars is both messy and disputed. But the Veyron and Chiron, and all other derivatives with the W16, are proper production cars, built in (by the standards of cars such as these) genuinely significant numbers and to incredibly exacting standards. They're into manufacturing the last of them now.

Fittingly, the final production W16s in assembly today consist of both track-special Bolides, in which the W16 is finally given its head in a car built specifically for a circuit, and these Mistrals, in which the engine's performative audibleness is given perhaps its most notable outing. There will only be 40 Bolides, along with 99 Mistrals.

Our drive of the Mistral is on roads around Bugatti's Molsheim factory: a stretch of dual carriageway, some villages and country roads on which, despite each Bugatti being extensively pre-delivery tested, seeing one still turns heads and makes children fall off their bicycles (I really hope you're okay, young man).

The Mistral continues the Bugatti tradition of being a doddle to drive. The cabin is roomy and beautifully finished, with a slightly different design feel from the Chiron coupé, which had Bugatti's signature 'C' swoop up into a rooflining that in this case isn't there. But the architecture is the same: two distinct 'sides', a widely adjustable steering wheel, no touchscreen, multi-functional controls on the centre stack. Material finish is as good as it comes.

Knock the gearlever over to Drive and that's it. Two pedals, both with easy responses; medium-weighted steering, accurate and linear, with two turns between locks but a wide turning circle so a pretty relaxed ratio. Good visibility, and comfortable and supportive seats. It would be quite undaunting if you didn't know it costs five million quid. Such is the Bugatti way.

This is my first drive of a roofless Bugatti, and any loss of rigidity – there must be a little – is barely noticeable. More noticeable than a roofless McLaren, perhaps, which all feel as rigid as the coupé. But here you're searching to feel the slightest difference. This is an easy car to get in and out of, with conventional doors, low sills – it's not like you're surrounded by stiffening materials.

The ride is good. Reasonably firm, because you would want body movements well contained, but absorbent enough. There's no option to change damper settings or steering weight, although some drive modes can change the car's height and angle of attack should you want to do a high-speed run.

But given this car's prodigious performance and 1977kg kerb weight, it is pleasing to find that it's fun, as with a Chiron, to drive at moderate speeds on back roads. Steering feel is good; it turns precisely and willingly.

But the engine remains the megastar, whether you're giving it the lot – briefly – on a dual carriageway and hoping your glasses don't get sucked into the engine, or if you're surfing a wave of torque, choosing your preferred throttle opening to pick the sound you like the most.

I'd be surprised if this W16 engine has ever been more easily enjoyable than in a Mistral. And as we reach late-stage petrol internal combustion, I don't suppose we'll ever see its like again.

MATT PRIOR

TECH SPEC

BUGATTI W16 MISTRAL

The W16 engine goes out on a high. We will never have heard it better

Price £5,170,000
Engine W16, 7993cc, quad-turbocharged, petrol
Power 1578bhp at 7000rpm
Torque 1180lb ft at 2250rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 1977kg
0-62mph 2.5sec
Top speed 282mph
Economy 13mpg
CO_2, tax band 495g/km, 37%
Rivals Ferrari SF90 XX Spider, Pagani Utopia Roadster, Koenigsegg CC850

TESTED 1.7.25, FRANKFURT, GERMANY **DELIVERIES** AUTUMN

KIA SPORTAGE

Ever-popular family SUV receives a mid-generation refresh

You'll know of the Kia Sportage. There's one on your road or your school run, if not on your driveway. Along with its sibling car, the Hyundai Tucson, the Sportage has become a default family SUV over recent decades, with a long warranty, lots of space, decent technology, reassuring dynamics and sharp styling making it the best-selling SUV in the UK last year and – so far – this year.

In fact, since it was introduced in 1995, Kia has sold more than 457,000 examples of the Sportage in the UK alone. So far, so profitable.

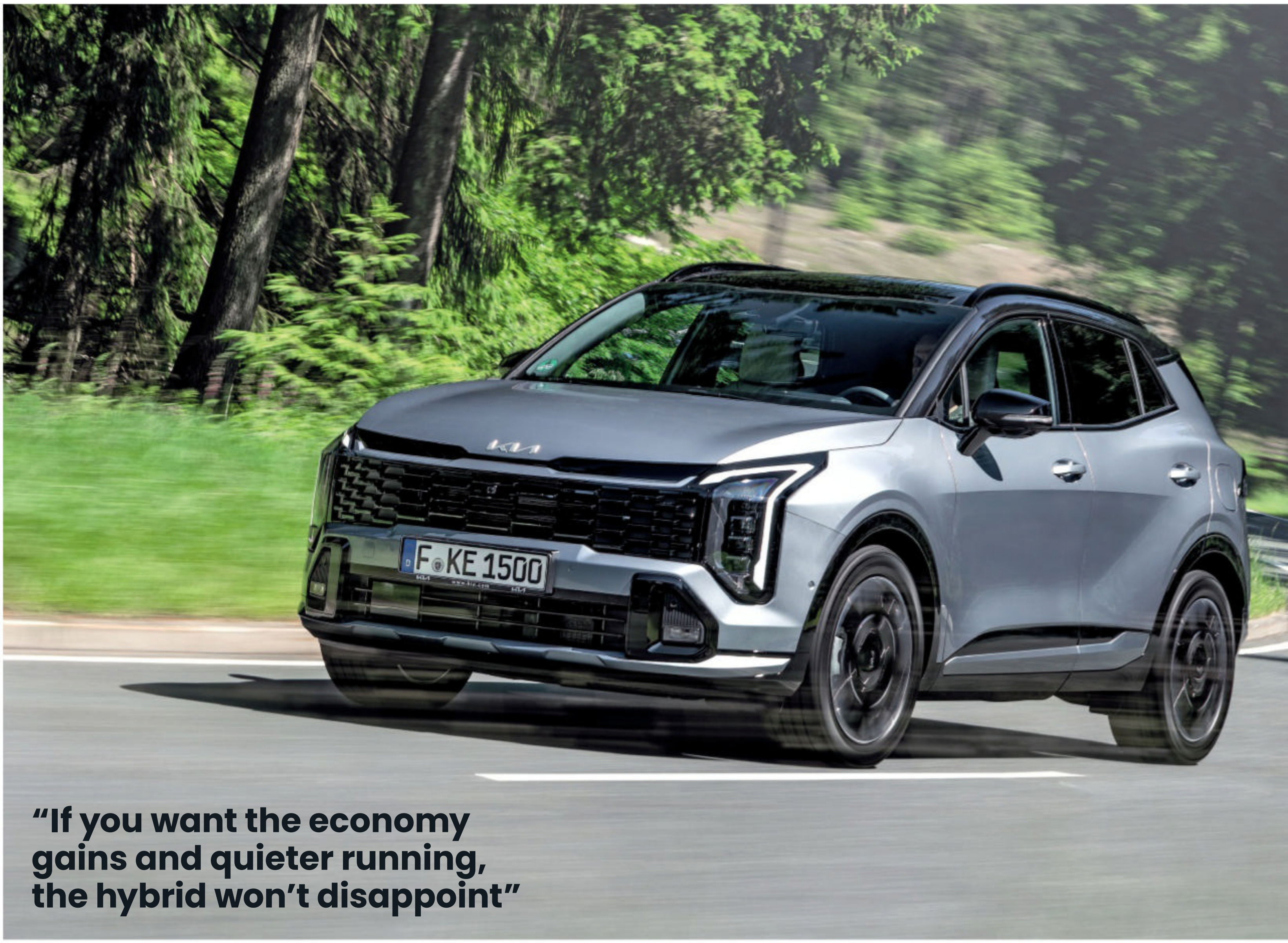
The current-generation model has been given a mid-life refresh. The most obvious update is the bluff grille, which now brings the Sportage more in line with the latest 'tiger nose' design that also dominates the forthcoming EV5.

That model, being a mid-size family SUV itself, arrives late this year and is in effect the pure-electric alternative to the Sportage, which doesn't get a full EV variant.

The Sportage does, however, keep the full line-up of piston-engined powertrains, starting with a turbocharged 1.6-litre petrol and stepping up through full-hybrid and plug-in hybrid variants. All have now been tweaked for slightly better efficiency and performance. Towing capacity for the hybrids has also been upped from 1360kg (braked) to 1510kg.

Other notable changes include the addition of wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto (previously you needed to plug your phone in), and there's now a head-up display on the top-spec variant of the newly slimmed-down line-up of three trims. Many of the gloss black trim finishes have now gone, in favour of brushed plastic finishes

Good-looking new fascia is more resistant to grubby fingerprints



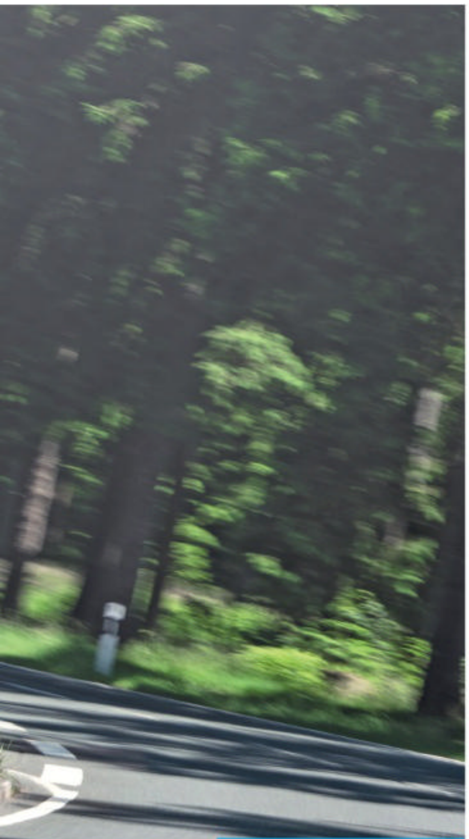
"If you want the economy gains and quieter running, the hybrid won't disappoint" that are a bit less smudge-prone.

Suffice to say that it's still a roomy, usefully practical family SUV, although it's a shame you only get two pairs of Isofix: there's no Isofix on the front passenger seat, as some rivals offer. That aside there's loads of room for those in the front and the back. The boot remains the same, at 587 litres in the HEV version that we test drove, and you get a standard height-adjustable boot floor as well as seats that fold flat in a useful 40/20/40 fashion.

The plug-in hybrid Sportage will arrive after the other variants and keep the same 13.8kWh battery, and it is likely to get a very slightly longer electric range of around 45 miles. We drove prototype versions of both the 1.6 petrol and 1.6 full hybrid (or self-charging hybrid, if you prefer) around Frankfurt and can confirm that it definitely still feels like a Sportage.

There have been no changes to the suspension or other dynamic aspects of the Sportage, but the full hybrid has a tweaked six-speed automatic gearbox and a new, more efficient electric motor. Power is up by 23bhp, taking total output to 235bhp for a slightly sprightlier 0-62mph time of 8.1sec if you go for the all-wheel-drive version we drove in prototype form (0-62mph takes 7.9sec in the front-drive HEV).

The Sportage has a soft set-up, but on 19s its low-speed ride isn't great



Lots of space for the family, but there are only two Isofix points

It gets a 587-litre boot with a height-adjustable floor

It's one of those cars that just does the job, the Sportage. The updated hybrid powertrain is still noisy if you accelerate with even moderate gusto, simply because the 1.6-litre turbocharged petrol engine sounds coarse if you let it rev up a bit. There's also a slight hesitation when the powertrain switches in or out of electric running. Otherwise the low thrum of the petrol engine kicking in is pretty easy to ignore, and the six-speed automatic still picks gears and blurs its changes well enough in everyday driving. You can also now toggle through three levels of brake regeneration via the steering wheel paddles. There's the choice of adaptive or fixed regeneration within those levels too, which brings an impressive level of regen flexibility and control that's rare on a full hybrid. If you want you can use the paddles to change gear when you're in Sport mode, but it will come as no surprise that this isn't much of a 'Sport mode' kind of car.

Body control is noticeably loose and pillowy, if controlled enough to not be nausea-inducing, but the soft spring rates make it all the more annoying that the secondary ride is too easily upset by patchy road surfaces. It's most noticeable at low speeds on poor town roads, where the Kia bumped and jarred a bit on the 19in alloy wheels that our top-spec test car came on.

Let's be honest: that the Sportage has a slightly peculiar blend of heavy body roll and reactive low-speed ride is unlikely to dent its popularity. Nor is the inert yet perfectly predictable and consistent steering and pedal controls. This is still a very secure, confident-feeling car, and the fact that you can now integrate your phone's map and media apps wirelessly into the infotainment system is likely to be of far more significance for many.

This is hardly a drastic refresh, but the even more brash new fascia works well here, and there's always that seven-year, 100,000-mile warranty to sweeten the deal. The standard 1.6 petrol Sportage is usefully cheaper than this hybrid powertrain, and it may well be the better option unless you're a company car buyer. But if you want the economy gains and quieter, cleaner about-town running, the hybrid won't disappoint.

It's not hard to see why this solid yet smart family SUV is such a hit, and these updates will help to keep it feeling fresh and relevant for that same audience.

VICKY PARROTT

TESTER'S NOTE

There's a really nice balance of physical buttons and touchscreen usability here. Proper air-conditioning switches and simple steering wheel buttons reduce dependence on the screen. **VP**

TECH SPEC

KIA SPORTAGE HYBRID 1.6 T-GDI GT-LINE S AWD

Better infotainment, performance and efficiency if rather forgettable to drive, but still a comfortable and well-rounded family SUV

Price £43,725
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1598cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 235bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 258lb ft at 1500-4500rpm
Gearbox 6-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 1650kg (est)
0-62mph 8.1sec
Top speed 122mph
Economy na
CO$_2$, tax band na
Rivals Hyundai Tucson Hybrid 4WD Ultimate, Peugeot 5008 Hybrid GT

TESTED 26.6.25, HEREFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** AUTUMN

RANGE ROVER ELECTRIC

Britain's benchmark luxury off-roader makes the bold leap to battery power. We get a first taste in prototype form

RANGE ROVER
VX25 PZO
PROTOTYPE VEHICLE PTV

Electric drive allows a finer, faster apportioning of power when off road

TESTER'S NOTE

The 3.5-tonne towing capacity of the standard car will drop to 2.5 tonnes in the EV. JLR has also developed special software to effectively estimate electric range when towing – which will take a hefty turn. **MS**

Right now, 2.8 tonnes of high-end automotive real estate is gently picking and clambering its way up a dusty, rocky forest track. It's doing so in a part of rural Herefordshire where for decades its various predecessors have been brought to earn their stripes as one of the most celebrated lineages in British car-making has advanced: that of the Range Rover. We are at JLR's Eastnor off-road development and demonstration centre, and we have come for our very first taste of arguably the boldest full-sized Rangie there has yet been.

The Range Rover Electric is JLR's first EV since the Jaguar I-Pace of 2018. It will be introduced to the global market later this year, at a time of uncertainty for the wider adoption of electric cars. And yet there's an equanimity about this car's execution, along with an authenticity about its identity, that suggests it will do all right whichever way the wind of public opinion happens to be blowing.

That's because rather than appearing as a novelty item, this car derives its strength from being just another Range Rover. It won't replace or supplant any other Range Rover derivative; nobody will be obliged, cajoled or persuaded to buy one. It's an extension of the Range Rover model line, to sit alongside the various petrol, diesel and PHEV derivatives that already exist, and it is designed to be every inch as capable, luxurious, enveloping and special as any of them.

233 miles
Range
81%
26/06/2025
003349 miles

The Range Rover Electric should have a range of 300 miles in production guise

> **"It sniffs out traction bit by bit, without any need to worry about the engine revs bogging down"**

Eastnor's tracks are mostly dry today, so they're clearly not presenting the challenge to this car's outright traction and torque-vectoring capacities that they might on a soggy December afternoon. But a cakewalk they ain't.

In places they climb and descend slippery gradients of more than 25deg, as well as twisting and turning around gullies and over rocks and ridges. And yet the unflappable calmness with which the Range Rover Electric can simply ease itself up, down, over and around everything before it inspires incredible confidence in its capabilities. Nothing seems to faze it. Nothing requires the merest run-up or suck-it-and-see hurried stab of power. It sniffs out traction bit by bit, like a mountain goatherd who has rehearsed every step, and without any need to worry about keeping the engine revs from bogging down, momentum from dying or wheels from spinning torque away fruitlessly.

Under the skin, this car uses the same MLA Flex aluminium-intensive model platform as the regular 'L460' Range Rover and 'L461' Range Rover Sport. "When we designed it for the current Range Rover [which appeared in 2021], we had both plug-in hybrid and BEV applications in mind," explains Simon Fairbrother, chief programme engineer.

The car uses a 118kWh nickel-manganese-cobalt drive battery, along with a permanent magnet synchronous motor on each axle for a combined 542bhp and 627lb ft. All of it is made at JLR's Electric Propulsion Manufacturing Centre in Wolverhampton.

More motors and more power, Fairbrother points out, would have required a bigger battery, which itself would have added weight, lowered efficiency and hurt range – and probably caused the engineers to extend battery capacity again to compensate, in a decidedly unvirtuous circle. This, he insists, is the right configuration and performance level for the Range Rover Electric, with the associated technology as it exists today. It should make for around 300 miles of real-world range, with on-road performance comparable to that of a top-level petrol V8.

Without an asymmetrical motor layout, the car vectors torque in off-road situations via open differentials and brake interventions, using specially ▸

Underfloor battery pack reduces ground clearance by 30mm

◂ developed Terrain Response traction control software adapted for the torque of electric motors. "We can control a slipping wheel about one hundred times faster than in the standard car," says Fairbrother.

The difference that makes to the Range Rover's off-road capability is remarkable, and in tandem with an apparent dearth of effort expended on what it's doing due to the absence of a revving engine, it makes for an air of assurance that suits a Range Rover quite brilliantly. As well as being superbly quiet and calm when running on asphalt, there's a serene composure about this car even at the toughest of moments. So accessible is the torque, and so fine and effective its electronic governance, that you seldom need more than 40% or 50% throttle to ease gently over the biggest roots or out of deep ruts. The loudest noises you will hear are likely to be water sloshing past the wheels, gravel crunching under the tyres and the background hum of the air-con.

The underfloor battery packaging has cost the Range Rover Electric a little outright ground clearance (260mm versus 290mm) and reduces its breakover angle (23deg versus 27deg), but it leaves the Range Rover's other minimum-standard capability stats untouched (900mm wading depth; 45deg 'drive-though' climbing capacity; stop-and-restart on a 35deg incline). The battery is well protected, its casing designed with enough strength and packaging margin so it can withstand grounding hits and take the odd whack from a rock.

Weight gain has been relatively well contained: "We're still working on the final homologated figure," says Fairbrother, "but the aim is to end up within 100kg or so of an equivalent PHEV model."

That's the one department where the Range Rover Electric stands to amount to less than you expect, I reckon. On this evidence, it seems, in most other respects it is simply 'more Range Rover': more refined, more effortless, more luxurious and more assured when the pressure is really on. And that can't be a bad way to take a rather large technological step.

MATT SAUNDERS

TECH SPEC

RANGE ROVER ELECTRIC PROTOTYPE

More assured, almost regardless of situation, than any Range Rover in its 55-year line. Electrification yields a lot but sacrifices little

Price £150,000 (est)
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 542bhp
Torque 627lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2800kg (est)
0-62mph 4.5sec
Top speed na
Battery 118kWh (usable)
Range, economy 300 miles (est), na
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Mercedes-Maybach EQS 680 SUV, BMW iX M70 xDrive

Electric powertrain's quiet composure and refinement is a perfect fit

UK VERDICTS

TESTER'S NOTE
The optional camera wing mirrors give a much wider field of view than conventional mirrors and draw helpful lines on the picture to show where you'll end up if you change lanes. The eye strain and the cost mean I'd still go for normal ones, but they seem to be improving. **IV**

TESTED 9.7.25, OXFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

HYUNDAI IONIQ 9

Seven-seat EV giant strides into town as a lower-priced Volvo EX90 rival

It's all about perspective. Yes, the new Ioniq 9, as tested here in bells-whistles-and-afterburners spec, is an £80,000 Hyundai. Viewed another way, it gives you much of what you would get with a top-spec Volvo EX90 or a Mercedes EQS SUV for £20,000 less.

We've already driven a prototype in California and a Korea-spec one in Busan and now Hyundai's seven-seat electric behemoth has landed in the UK. Our first drive on home soil is in a Performance Calligraphy model, which means dual motors with a combined output of 429bhp and all the kit you could wish for. This variant is likely to be a niche seller so we'll do a full road test later with a more mainstream version.

As a reminder, this is basically Hyundai's version of the Kia EV9, though it has an even bigger battery, more power and a bunch more upgrades that have appeared since the Kia was launched in 2023.

It's a design that doesn't photograph well, perhaps because you need to be so far away to get all of it in the frame. It is absolutely huge. But in the metal, it comes alive. The proportions make more sense the more you look at it and there are so many intricate details: hidden patterns behind the front 'grille', wheels that look like they're off a '70s Alpina (but 21in rather than 15in) and the way the rear looks like a time-travelling Mk2 Volvo V70. It's wild, and I'm here for it.

The same theme continues inside. Palatial is the word that comes to mind, reinforced by the marble-effect panel in the dash. There are quirky shapes and patterns and so many cubbies and trays. This is the opposite of those generic Chinese EVs that are just a big screen and acres of fake leather, and all the better for it. The materials aren't in the same league as those in an EX90, but I'd rather have the Ioniq's copious buttons and near-faultless usability. On both counts, it feels like a step up from a Volkswagen ID Buzz. The best seats in the house are the swivelling captain's chairs that in our six-seat test car make up the second row – the comfort, space and view out are outstanding.

Adults can squeeze into the third row but will be quite cramped. However, this is one of just a few six/seven-seat SUVs with Isofix child seat mountings in the third row.

On the road is where you notice why this is still a lot cheaper than the blue-chip luxury options. The Ioniq 9 doesn't have air suspension or four-wheel steering and it shows. With a 12.5m turning circle and 2.9 turns lock to lock, manoeuvring in a tight car park requires much circumspection. The ride is always a bit lumpy, yet when you tip it into a bend, it feels all of its 2.6 tonnes as the body leans over.

Compared with something like a Peugeot e-5008, though, it's fine. But what isn't good enough is the efficiency. On a perfect summer's day, I got 2.7mpkWh. If we assume a usable battery capacity of 105kWh, that gives 284 miles of range. A Mercedes EQS SUV and BMW iX will both crack 3.0mpkWh and 300 miles in similar circumstances. The slower and shorter-range ID Buzz GTX won't do any better, though.

You can just about get an iX xDrive45 on air suspension with four-wheel steer for similar money to this top-spec Ioniq 9. If a third row isn't a conditio sine qua non, that would be my recommendation. If it is, the Ioniq 9 is clearly a more advanced proposition than the e-5008 or ID Buzz, and much cheaper than the EX90. It has clear appeal, though lower-spec versions are likely to be easier to recommend.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

HYUNDAI IONIQ 9 PERFORMANCE CALLIGRAPHY 6 SEAT

Big, bold Hyundai is well thought out, practical and a real statement. Disappointing efficiency, though

★★★★☆

Price £78,595
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 429bhp
Torque 516lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2610kg
0-62mph 5.2sec
Top speed 124mph
Battery 110.3kWh (total)
Range, economy 373 miles, 3.0mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals BMW iX, Peugeot e-5008, Volvo EX90

It feels like a big, 2610kg car in corners – and car parks

Swivelling captain's chairs enhance the sense of space

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5761

RENAULT 4

Utility appeal refashioned for a new age taps EV tech from a class leader

MODEL TESTED
RENAULT 4 E-TECH COMFORT RANGE ICONIC
Price £30,995
Power 148bhp
Torque 181lb ft
0-60mph 8.6sec
30-70mph 7.5sec
Top speed 93mph (claimed)
70-0mph 48.3m (23deg C, dry)
Range 182/172/291 miles (average/touring/everyday)
Economy 3.5/3.3/5.6mpkWh (average/touring/everyday)
Weighted average charging rate 74kW

Renault's daring decision to reinvent the famous 5 and bust one of car design's fundamental rules – 'never regurgitate your history' – appears to have been a masterstroke. The new, all-electric 5 oozes character inside and out, it handles smartly and it is ultra-competitive on cost. It's now the clear leader in a congested class.

The strategists at Renault's HQ in Boulogne-Billancourt will be doubly delighted because they've had the chance to repeat the trick with another back-catalogue icon: the 4.

You'll know the source material. More than eight million 4s were sold between 1961 and 1994, with production in places ranging from Wexford in Ireland to Antananarivo in Madagascar where, brilliantly, the little French station wagon remains the taxi du jour.

Where the original 5 was more about fun, the 4 was about practicality. It offered surprisingly good ride comfort on France's war-torn country roads, as well as total utility. The need to maximise interior space is why the original 4 has a different wheelbase on each side; one of the semi-trailing arms on the rear suspension is mounted just ahead of the other, to prevent the mechanicals encroaching on cabin space. For the same reason, the gearbox is mounted directly ahead of the engine: no awkward transmission tunnel. The big boot opening also extends to the very base of the bumper.

The reinvented 4 isn't quite so extreme in its pursuit of utility, and doesn't quite match the original's 22cm or so of fairly unregulated suspension travel (neither, frankly, would we want it to). Nor, at £27k or more, does it quite have rock-bottom pricing. (If anything, the 4's true modern counterpart is the Dacia Duster.) But it does recapture to a fair extent the philosophy of its progenitor and is meaningfully different from the new 5, with which it shares a platform and nearly everything else. Is it similarly lovable? Let's find out.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★⯪

PROS Charismatic looks; grown-up suspension; reasonably light
CONS No 4WD version, yet

Renault sold more than eight million 4s

In its positioning, the 4 is to the 5 what the Captur is to the Clio. At 4144mm, the newer car is 222mm longer than the 5 (but not any wider), with 84mm of that difference found in the wheelbase and plenty of the remainder in the rear overhang, with its chunky bumper and characteristically forward-leaning tailgate.

The two-box silhouette is of course now crossover-flavoured, with a propped-up ride height enhanced by tyres with a slightly greater profile than those on the 5, but it is unmistakably 4. Throwback details come in the form of circular headlights within an LED-rimmed, one-piece grille that references the original's aluminium surround, introduced in 1967, and ridges along the flanks, which were introduced a little later. The rear quarterlight window is another reference to the original 4, as are the neat, lens-less tail-lights.

The underlying chassis is as per the 5's, so developed by Ampere – the separate, comparatively agile business under the Renault Group umbrella that specialises in electric powertrains and software. The same modular platform will underpin the upcoming Twingo and uses the same front-axle assembly as the Clio, with a multi-link rear axle (no offset torsion bars here – they would get in the way of the battery) that is adapted from the 4WD Duster. The battery is a liquid-cooled 52kWh NMC unit. Its four-module design is simpler than that of the same-sized battery in the Zoe and the 30kg that saves drops the weight under 300kg.

It means the battery accounts for about 20% of the kerb weight, which was 1493kg on our scales – a modest 32kg more than the 5 we recently tested (and in an identical spec) and about as little as one could expect from a B-segment EV crossover.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Visually engaging; excellent digital array; adult-friendly back row
CONS Rear seats don't fold flat; some cheaper elements at the £30k-plus level

While the original 4 was almost unbelievably basic inside, the new 4's cockpit is nearly identical to that of the lauded 5, which is anything but. Here you'll find a variety of playful materials and interesting ideas that, within the class, only the Mini Aceman attempts to match. Think ribbed stitching on the passenger side, puppytooth-esque pattern on the door cards, seats that wouldn't look out of place in an original 5 Turbo (minus the lurid tones), and small bursts of colour dotted about. The Mercedes-style gear selector is also finished with a crystal-like tip that has the Renault logo etched into it. It's a bit of jewellery you might typically expect to find in a high-spec Volvo and would be even better if pushing it placed the car into park. (As is, it does nothing at all.)

■ The grille is rather an unusual element. It's fitted as a single piece, some 145cm long, and is considered an 'outsized' component on the production line, much like the windscreen or dashboard. Don't worry, though: damage can be repaired in a localised way.

■ All 4s are fitted with 18in wheels that wear higher-profile tyres than the 5, for a little extra ground clearance. Those wanting more still will need to wait for a production version of the recent Savane concept, with its four-wheel drive and even greater clearance.

The layout impresses too. The two higher grades – Techno and Iconic, which sit above the entry-level Evolution – feature a large, crisp, digital instrument binnacle that merges into the central touchscreen, but in a way that doesn't feel overbearing. We won't repeat ourselves too much because our comments in the recent 5 road test (Autocar, 12 March) also apply here, but suffice to say the blend of physical and digital switchgear is well conceived. This is among the more intuitive cabins in the class when it comes to simple commands – skipping a track or turning up the fan speed, for instance.

The driving ergonomics are good too. The striking floating bolsters of the seats aren't quite as supportive as the racy look suggests, but there's a maturity and ease to the driving position itself that makes the 4 immediately relaxing once you've slid aboard. You don't feel unduly perched, either, despite the presence of a battery in the floor.

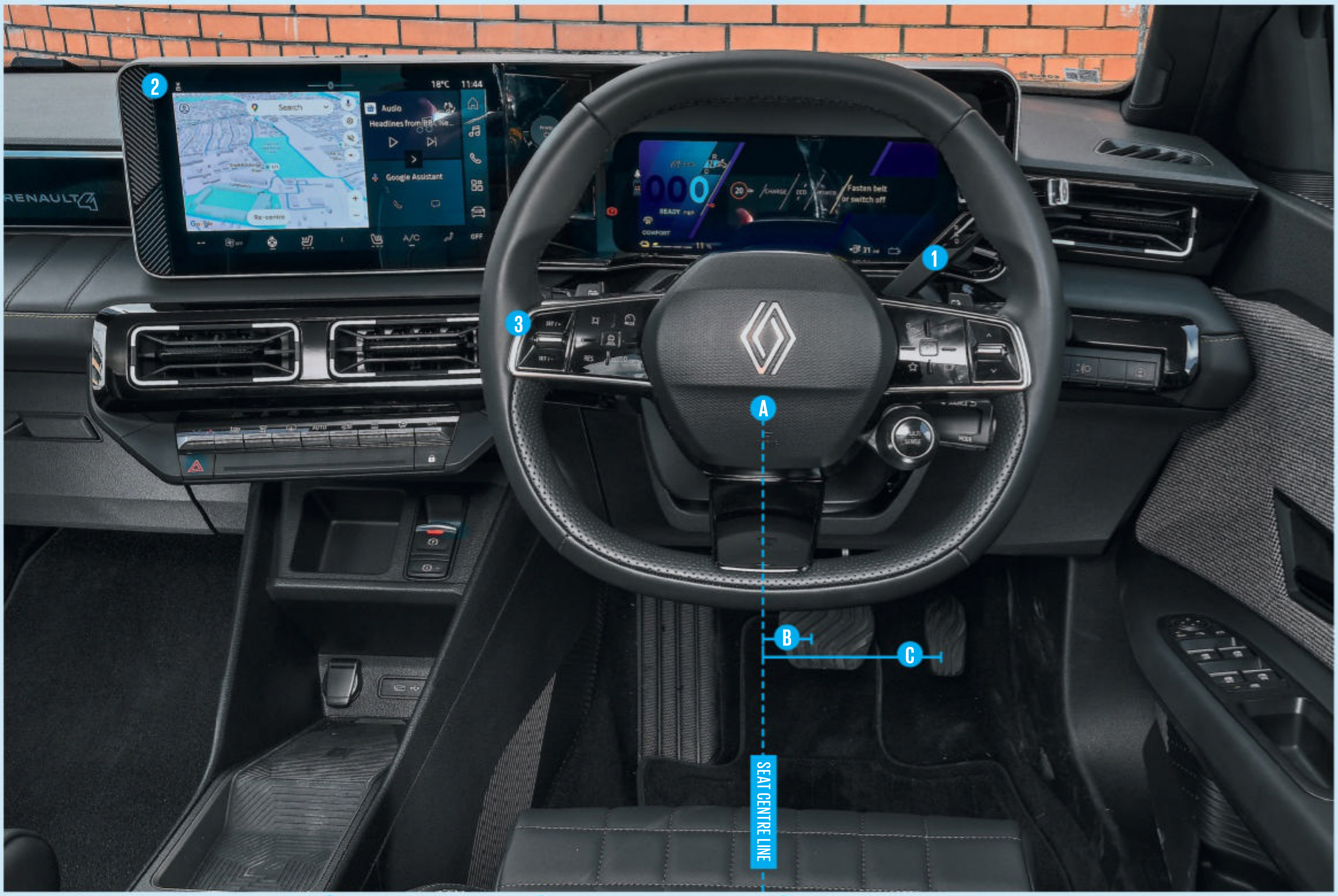
Practicality is of course the area where this car offers notably more than its 5 sibling. At 375 litres, boot capacity is more than 30% greater than the 5's, with a squared-off opening and a low, knee-height lip inspired by the original car. This is respectably capacious but doesn't ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN BRADSHAW

① Gear selector frees up space on the centre console, but too often a switch from drive to reverse, or vice versa, doesn't register at first, which can make manoeuvring a tad irksome.

② The 10in OpenR multimedia touchscreen is standard on all trims and benefits from Google services. The map runs slickly and gives useful EV-specific information en route.

③ There's an ADAS-related button that can quickly switch the settings for a custom set-up. That's great, but we couldn't seem to disable the slightly unnerving speed-change bong.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 50mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 180mm right. Otherwise manual seats get a good degree of electric lumbar adjustment. It's a fine driving position and well aligned, though the seat base's bolstering might be odd to some.

◂ trouble the Kia EV3 (460 litres, and while the South Korean car is half a class up in the world, it's priced keenly) and neither do the Renault's back seats fold down flat, as the Kia's do. The 4 does, however, have useful cubbies that the Kia goes without, as well as stretchy fabric tabs for keeping smaller items in place. There's also a 36-litre bin underneath the floor, which will typically be used for charging cables but has added versatility in being removable and easy to clean. Left-hand-drive cars also have the ability to fold down the back of the front passenger seat, liberating several metres of storage space – you might even slide a double bass into the car. Alas, right-hand-drive cars don't get this feature.

Second-row space is probably the main reason you would buy the 4 instead of the 5. There isn't an overabundance of knee room, but there's enough to make the place habitable for adults for more than very short journeys, which isn't true of the 5. Renault has successfully squeezed every millimetre of head room out of this package by using a thin, domed trim for the roof, and passengers can easily get their feet under the front seats, which isn't true of the Ford Puma Gen-E. It isn't lavish back here but it is usable. An upcoming 'Plein Sud' version with a canvas folding roof will boost the sense of light and space further – at least when the weather's good.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★⯪

PROS Has the performance you need; good spread of regen modes
CONS Still not what you would call sprightly

One of the few oversights in the 5 is that the powertrain offers neither a one-pedal driving mode nor a proper freewheeling mode. Presumably this was an easy fix, because the 4 does get rather an aggressive one-pedal mode. (Lifting off the accelerator causes the car to slow dramatically, until it reaches a complete stop.) From there, by using paddles on the back of the steering wheel, you can reduce the level of regen braking effect until you're in what is close to being a true freewheeling mode, where the 4 coasts along happily under the power of its own momentum or gravity. As ever, it's great to have the choice.

Elsewhere, the 4 is an intuitive device. The brake pedal is quite sensitive at first but you get used to that soon enough and can then enjoy its surprisingly firm feel. In a class with no shortage of spongy brake pedals, this counts as another pleasant surprise and a reminder that Renault cares about the details.

The performance is exactly what you would want and expect in a car like this. An 8.6sec as-tested 0-62mph time puts the 4 four-tenths behind its smaller, lighter sibling and just under a second behind the Puma Gen-E. Meanwhile, a 30-70mph time of 7.5sec isn't going to blow anybody's socks off but it's enough to nab that overtake when you need to, or get up to speed on an awkwardly short slip road. It does the job and the 4's turn of pace is about on a par in this class, at this price. Staying in the electric sphere, going notably quicker entails spending a fair amount more on the likes of the £37k Mini Aceman JCW or the Volvo EX30. Yes, Renault makes an Alpine-tuned version of the 5 with either 174bhp or 215bhp, but we're unlikely to see the frumpier 4 given the same treatment. Those who need a quicker take on this mini-wagon should wait for a potential 4WD version, which would add a second motor, this time on the back axle.

Performance aside, drivability is first-rate. Acceleration picks up crisply but not too crisply and there are no jarring synthetic powertrain noises. (You get barely anything, in fact.) It's possible to vary the response of the powertrain by pushing the mode select button on the steering wheel but, honestly, this isn't that kind of car and most of the time you'll stay in Comfort.

If there is a slight blot in the 4's copybook, it concerns emergency stops. Even on a warm day, the ABS intervention was rudimentary, although the outright stopping distance was similar overall to that of the Puma Gen-E. (Incidentally, both cars are shod with Goodyear EfficientGrip Performance 2 rubber.) When we tested it, the 5 did better, even in much cooler conditions. Perhaps the difference was down to its Continental tyres.

HANDLING & STABILITY

★★★★☆

PROS Easy company in any environment; feels grown-up
CONS Not as interesting to drive as the 5 or the Puma Gen-E

As befits its more laid-back, less showy role, the 4 has a softer suspension tune than the 5 and, by our reckoning, the steering is just a touch calmer in its motion off-centre. The alterations are subtle, but combined with the bigger car's higher centre of gravity and the extra metal in its wheelbase, the resulting character is different. Question is: is it still good fun?

Well, no. The 4 doesn't have the crisp turn-in, the natural adjustability and the cheeky balance that all combine to bottle 'fun' in the way the 5 manages – and, for that matter, the recent Puma Gen-E, with its quietly delicious marriage of steering angle and roll, and that Ford-typical love of direction changes.

But this doesn't mean the 4 isn't composed and satisfying to drive in a broad range of environments. It certainly has a maturity about it, helped by that independent rear axle. It steers precisely and is perfectly easy to place. And while it doesn't have the agility of the 5, it does have plenty of natural balance, which allows it to claw surprisingly high cornering speeds from its touring tyres with minimal drama. As an everyday companion, we have no complaints about the rounded 4.

COMFORT & STABILITY

★★★★☆

PROS Mature gait; good noise isolation; impressive in town
CONS Still, at times, exhibits its supermini roots

At this end of the market, comfort is less about beating your rival by a decibel or two on the motorway and more about the basics. Are the seats genuinely comfortable in both the front and the back, and for more than half an hour at a time? Can the chassis lap up motorway work or are higher speeds a bit attritional? Does the car's general manner have a confidence-inspiring solidity about it or is there an unsettling flightiness underwheel? Does the chassis continuously fidget?

In all these respects, the 4 performs more than adequately. On threadbare road surfaces, there's a reactivity underwheel you get in all cars this size, but it is slight and in general the 4 cuts a refined figure. That little bit of extra sidewall in the tyre compared with the 5 also helps, and in a blindfolded test (not advised), you could be fooled into thinking the 4 hailed from the class above it, where the Mini Countryman Electric and Kia EV3 reside. It has that level of composure about it, particularly on winding country roads, where it makes reassuringly effortless progress and resists the sort of roll and float that can make small cars a real chore when you're out of town.

As for noise, seeing that we have mentioned it, the 4 is quieter at a 70mph cruise than both the 5 and the Puma Gen-E. And, for that matter, the larger, plusher Kia EV3. Chapeau, Renault.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Well priced; excellent efficiency in mixed use
CONS Charging speeds shaded by cars not much more expensive

The range starts at £26,995 for the comparatively basic Evolution (which doesn't come with Google service integration), rises to £28,955 for Techno trim and tops out at £30,995 for the Iconic model tested here. It means that, sticking rigidly within its class, the Renault undercuts the Jeep Avenger and the Ford Puma Gen-E but not the Vauxhall Mokka. Of course, the 4's charm and ability also mean it will be cross-shopped with larger cars such as the Mini Countryman Electric and Kia EV3, as well as Volvo's EX30, all of which it undercuts considerably, with few trade-offs in terms of equipment.

So what does the 4 get? Opt for mid-ranking Techno trim and you get the full digital array, four USB-C ports, adaptive cruise control, parking sensors, plenty of ambient interior light combinations and upholstery made from recycled materials, as well as plenty more.

In terms of efficiency, the 4 did a little better than the 5 in all types of driving, though this is almost certainly down to the much warmer, more favourable weather on the day of its test at Horiba MIRA. Its everyday economy figure (a test that comprises a blend of speeds in the 20-50mph range, and a steady driving style) of 5.6mpkWh translates to a range of 291 miles, which is stellar, though not quite as stellar as the Puma Gen-E's figure of 6.2mpkWh. The efficiency of the 4's powertrain predictably falls as speeds increase. Our tested car returned 3.3mpkWh in our 70mph touring economy test, for a real-world motorway range of 172 miles. For a car in the 4's mould, with a relatively small battery, this is in line with expectations.

As for charging, Renault claims a peak 100kW DC rate, and at 10% state of charge, our test was drawing a little more than that. Its charging speed was reasonably well sustained, only dropping below 70kW after passing 60% SoC. The weighted average between 10% and 90% SoC was 74kW, compared with 68kW for the Puma Gen-E. This is respectable performance from the Renault, though anybody who sees themselves using public charging regularly would be better served by Skoda's Elroq 50 (from £31,510), with its 145kW peak rate. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1060mm, head room 1000mm. Front of cabin is spacious enough and you don't feel perched, despite the battery beneath.

REAR Leg room 630mm, head room 970mm. Rear leg room betters the 5's and also that of the Ford Puma Gen-E, perhaps the Renault's main rival.

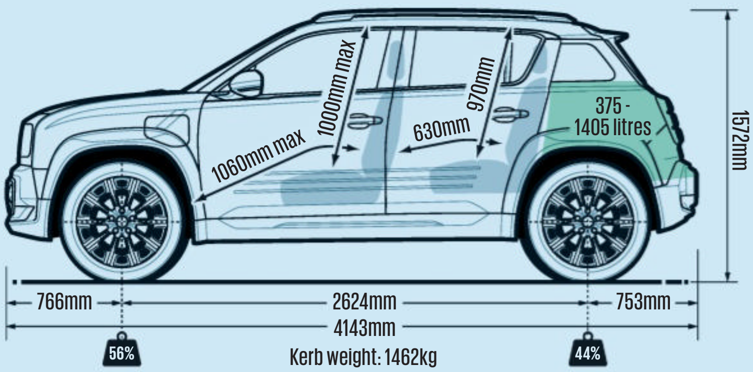
BOOT Length 800-1580mm, width 1000mm, height 550-800mm. Boot space is respectable but the big benefit is the low lip and square opening.

"As an everyday companion, we have no complaints about it"

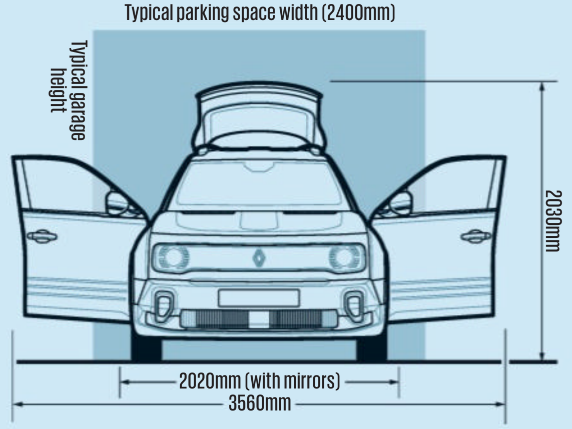
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4143mm **Width** 2020mm (with mirrors) **Height** 1572mm
Door span 3560mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2030mm

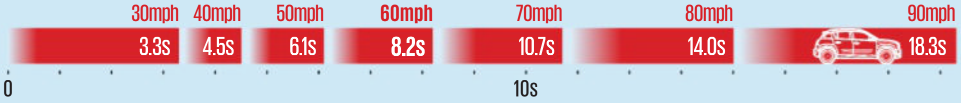

1060mm max
1000mm max
630mm
970mm
375 -
1405 litres
1572mm
766mm
2624mm
753mm
4143mm
56%
44%
Kerb weight: 1462kg

PARKING

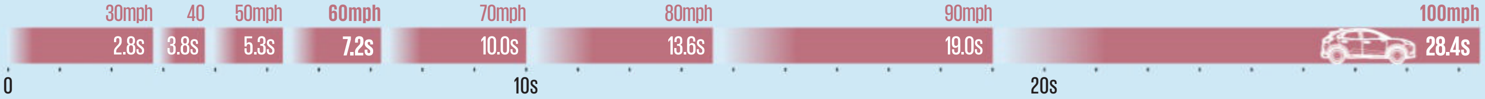

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2030mm
2020mm (with mirrors)
3560mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 23deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 16.5sec at 86.2mph **Standing km** 30.9sec at 94.2mph **30-70mph** 7.5sec **50-80mph** 7.9sec **0-62mph** 8.6sec

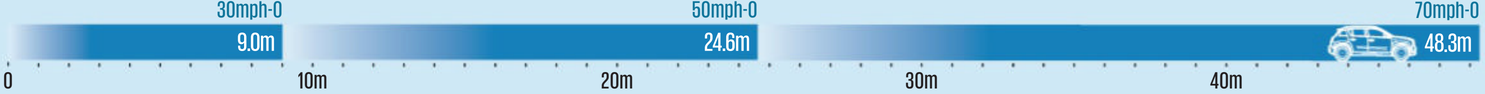


Ford Puma Gen-E Select (2025, 18deg C, dry)
Standing quarter mile 16.0sec at 84.9mph **Standing km** 30.1sec at 101.4mph **30-70mph** 7.2sec **50-80mph** 8.3sec

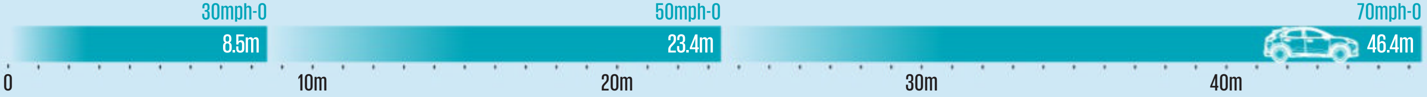


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.70sec

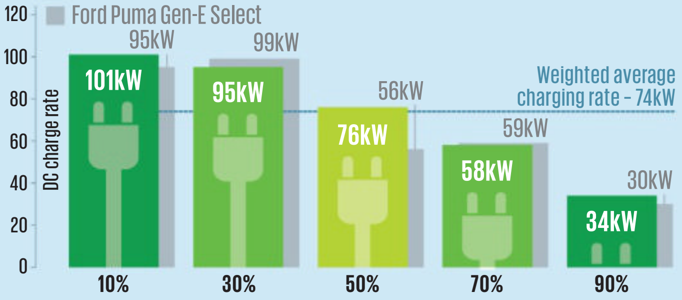


Ford Puma Gen-E Select (2025, 18deg C, dry)



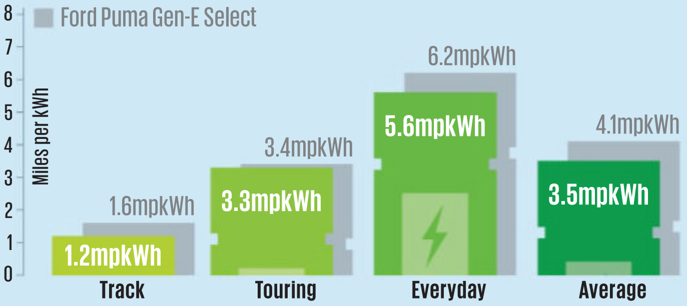
RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

Charging port location Nearside front wing **Charger used** 300kW, Hypercharger HYC_350 **AC charging** 11kW, three-phase

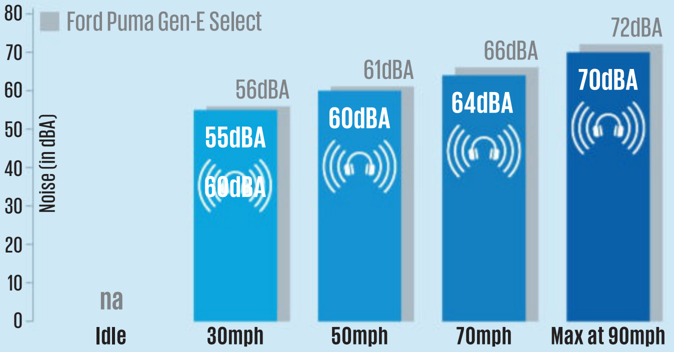


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 247 miles, 4.0mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 182/172/291 miles (average/touring/everyday)

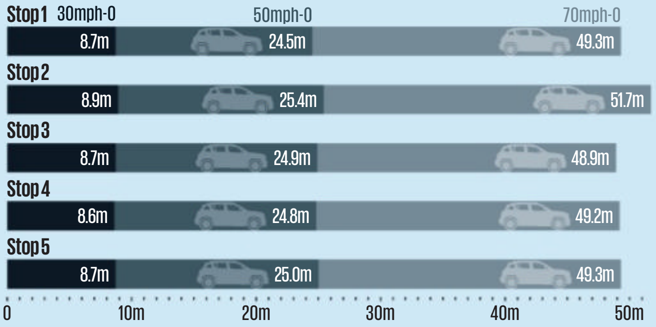


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 0m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

RENAULT 4 E-TECH COMFORT RANGE ICONIC

On-the-road price £30,995
Price as tested £32,145
Value after 3yrs/36k miles na
Typical PCP £259 pcm (£9299 deposit + 25 months/13,000 miles)
Insurance group 28A

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 18in 'Parisienne' alloy wheels, automatic LED headlights, automatic windscreen wipers, privacy glass, roof rails, electric tailgate, ambient interior lighting, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, 10.3in driver's display, four USB-C ports, three Isofix points
Optional Hauts-de-France green paint £1150
Also available Black-painted bonnet £100

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Front, transverse, FWD
Type Synchronous motor with coiled rotor
Power 148bhp
Torque 181lb ft
Maximum regen capacity 95kW
Battery type NMC
Capacity 52.0kWh (usable)
Voltage 400V
Power to weight 101bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 124lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1462kg/1493kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 56%/44%
Drag coefficient 0.33
Wheels 6.5Jx18in
Tyres 195/60 R18 96H, Goodyear EfficientGrip Performance 2
Spare None (mobility foam)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.5 turns lock to lock; 10.8m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 296mm ventilated discs, single-piston calipers
Rear 280mm solid discs, single-piston calipers
Handbrake type Electronic, automatic

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 4 stars (2024)
Adult occupant 79%, child occupant 85%, vulnerable road users 73%, safety assist 68%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO$_2$ 0g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £10/£20

VERDICT

Charismatic but grown-up, the 4 is a real contender

★★★★☆

That the Renault 4 – the quiet, ultra-utilitarian, semi-forgotten character from the 1960s – would be reincarnated in 2025 as a bubbly electric crossover seemed unlikely not long ago. However, once the decision to revive the 5 was made, offering a more practical sibling was obvious.

We suspect the resulting car is on course to have quite an impact in the circa-£30k EV sphere, trading a portion of the 5's vivacity for useful passenger and luggage space, while retaining the smaller car's sense of fun and imagination.

These are powerful attributes that the 4 pairs with fine everyday efficiency, a slick digital suite and the kind of easygoing drivability that has been a hallmark of French cars. Higher-spec models encroach on the patch of larger, more capable cars, but below £30k the new 4 is a stellar option.

TESTERS' NOTES

RICHARD LANE
The 4 is assembled in Europe – in Maubeuge, home of the Kangoo – with the battery and motor made close to home too. Fairly unusual, that. Renault also says 75% of suppliers are within 185 miles of the lines.

MATT SAUNDERS
The 4 wouldn't make a bad accomplice on a camping trip, not least because it features 11kW vehicle-to-load charging functionality for appliances up to 220V. You could connect a twin-induction hob, or charge e-bikes. You can also tow trailers up to 750kg.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Bring on the 4WD version, and give it some real, Panda 4x4-style off-road ability.
- Improve touring economy.
- Offer the folding front passenger seat.

RANKING RIVALS

	1 **SKODA ELROQ 50 SE**	2 RENAULT 4 COMFORT RANGE ICONIC	3 **FORD PUMA GEN-E PREMIUM**	4 **MINI ACEMAN SE**	5 **JEEP AVENGER ELECTRIC LONGITUDE**	**BYD ATTO 2**
	Broadly speaking, the Skoda is the least compromised car in the class. It's dull next to the 4 but you'll easily forgive it that.		The best-handling of all the small EV crossovers. Let down by a patchy cabin and rear leg room.	Strong performance and fun to drive but light on the practicality that is supposed to distance it from the Cooper.	The 4's closest rival can't match the French car's space and quality.	BYD's assault on the B-crossover segment is unlikely to be as lovable as the 4 but could prove very capable indeed.
	★★★★⯪		★★★★☆	★★★⯪☆	★★★☆☆	
Price	£31,510		£31,995	£31,905	£29,999	£27,500 (est)
Power, torque	168bhp, 229lb ft		166bhp, 214lb ft	215bhp, 243lb ft	154bhp, 192lb ft	174bhp, 251lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	8.7sec, 99mph		8.0sec, 99mph	7.1sec, 105mph	9.0sec, 93mph	7.9sec, 100mph
Range, economy	232 miles, 3.9mpkWh		234 miles, 4.7mpkWh	251 miles, 4.4mpkWh	249 miles, 3.9mpkWh	260 miles, na

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

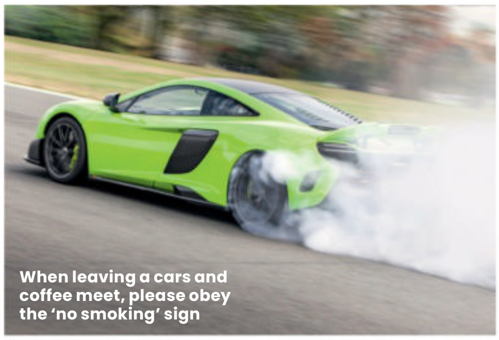
Anyone who drives a yellow SF90 Spider is a… hang on, that's Matt!

In honour of the Goodwood Festival of Speed (see News, p4), let's ponder one of the petrolhead's 'chicken and egg' questions. What came first: the noisy, brightly coloured supercar – or the reckless, narcissistic show-off you so often see at the wheel of one?

A road tester may be in a uniquely fair position to address that. I'm lucky enough to drive plenty of fast, loud, exotic cars in my regular line of work, but not because I've spent a perspective-eroding sum to own any of them. I have no interest to declare. I frequently have been, am and will continue to be both tutting bystander and tutted-at offender.

More often, probably, the former. How often have you been at a car show, event or club meet and seen a supercar that you're inexorably drawn towards a short time before it is driven in a way that makes you roll your eyes?

Well, let's consider the case for the defence.



When leaving a cars and coffee meet, please obey the 'no smoking' sign

> **"When you drive a supercar, you are fair game, an attraction"**

The next time you tut, ponder for a moment if your own expectations may be a factor. Modern supercars are, I assure you, dramatic, attention-grabbing cars. Wherever you drive one, take one, park one, or just stand next to one in a manner suggestive of ownership, you are fair game. You are an attraction. You have invited the gaze of the public. Eleven-year-olds at bus stops wave their arms and shout: "Rev it!" People ask to take photos, to see inside. They want to know what it's like. Of course they do.

I usually retreat to a discreet distance and admit at the earliest opportunity that "it's borrowed", because I don't like the glare that these cars create – much less the idea that someone might assume I'd intended to bathe in it. Whatever you do, though, you can't really escape it; and clearly, for some, the water's lovely and they're very happy to get carried away by it.

Also, when driving a supercar, you might be surprised just how hard you need to work in order not to conform to the stereotype. That sounds like the ultimate cop-out. But when there's 800 horsepower under your toe, a very ordinary prod of the accelerator can easily cue up an angry downshift, a loud flare of revs, and rather more forward thrust than you intended.

But while the dynamic mission of a supercar can be a contributing factor in all of this, the very image of one can in fact corrupt perceptions all by itself. I once took a Ferrari SF90 Spider to a certain popular 'cars and coffee' venue in the English Midlands. The one where a mantra is displayed opposite the car park exit to remind visitors to leave considerately – in amusingly anatomical terms.

Well, I can assure you, I did. And yet, because I was driving a yellow Ferrari, whoever was running the social media feed for the aforementioned venue on the day in question used a photo of the car next to the 'Don't Be A Dick' sign, to imply that its owner hadn't been so responsible. Comments were soon made to confirm how quickly I'd driven away and how others should be more careful.

As it happened, my young daughter, who had ridden in another car on our outbound journey, was with me in the Ferrari on that return leg. She had been a bit nervous of the car, so I'd spent a while reassuring her that all would be well, that cars are just cars and needn't be scary. I vividly remember tiptoeing out of the gate and down the road as gingerly as I could. I think the SF90 was in electric mode, so no yobby V8 noise at all. But it didn't matter a jot. People simply saw – or, rather, remembered – exactly what suited them.

How many of those same people might have thronged and cheered at the start line of the Goodwood hill last weekend, I wonder. And how many would be willing to consider the idea that, if they didn't lavish so much attention on supercars wherever they're found, the drivers of those supercars might not so often 'revert to type'?

When two became one

The Toyota Prius braved the storm of early derision to become the petrol-electric engineering benchmark. **JAMES DISDALE** celebrates 25 years of the hybrid pioneer

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

GY25 FUM
X599 VRM

First-gen Prius's mix of ICE and electric feels surprisingly modern

Taxi! It's the reductive cry of many when a Prius hums into view, Toyota's pioneering hybrid hatchback having become the ubiquitous Uber for a generation of ride-hailing devotees. Yet as the petrol-electric model celebrates its quarter century on sale in the UK, does the incredibly efficient and relentlessly reliable Prius deserve to be seen – and appreciated – as more than just a default choice for hard-nosed mini-cabbers?

The obvious answer is yes, of course it does. In fact, the Prius is perhaps one of the most misunderstood and occasionally divisive cars to have hit the roads in the past 25 years. When it landed on these shores in 2000, diehard petrolheads quickly named it the 'Pious' – a swipe at early adopting owners who were evangelical about its tech and fuel-savings. Yet it was also an unlikely Hollywood pin-up, with eco-friendly A-listers such as Leonardo DiCaprio choosing the Prius to scoot between studios.

Either way, over five generations it has become as familiar a sight on our roads as white lines and temporary traffic lights: more than six million have been sold to date, making it the world's most popular hybrid. Those sheer numbers mean Toyota's engineering brilliance is often overlooked, so it seems an ideal time to get one of the first examples together with the latest version and perhaps reappraise this dual-fuel pioneer.

As is the case today, environmental concerns were very much in the headlines when the Prius first appeared in its native Japan back in 1997, with the result that manufacturers were keen to develop cars that minimised their impact on the world's resources. The European approach was to remain faithful to internal combustion engines, installing them in lightweight, low-drag bodies, and the Audi A2 is perhaps the most obvious example. In Japan, however, petrol-electric hybrids were the order of the day.

At roughly the same time the covers were pulled off the Prius, Honda launched its innovative Insight coupé. Like the A2, it featured a low-calorie construction and wind-cheating bodywork, while under its snub snout was a clever powertrain that was the progenitor of today's mild hybrids. It was styled like a concept car and built with the same obsessive attention to detail as the firm's first-generation NSX supercar. But whatever the Honda's virtues, it was a sales flop – just like the Audi.

Toyota's approach was slightly different, but in many ways it was in fact more daring. A traditional four-door saloon template made the Prius look like a far more mundane machine, but that sober suit hid a much more sophisticated drivetrain that remains largely the same today as it was all those years ago.

Essentially, it has two electric motors: the MG1 is a starter-generator similar to those in today's mild hybrids, while the MG2 is the traction motor, which also acts as a generator. Both of these then have to work harmoniously with the car's petrol engine, which can be connected to the road wheels at higher speeds or when maximum performance is required, but normally it feeds electricity into the battery. Making all of these mechanical machinations possible is the 'power splitter'.

Often referred to as a continuously variable transmission (CVT), it actually uses a planetary gearset rather than the usual belts and pulleys. Packed together with the two motors and bolted onto the engine, it uses computers to decide where best to send power depending on the prevailing conditions, allowing it to operate as either a series or a parallel hybrid. Clever, eh?

Approach the Mk1 today and you would never guess at the ▸

What does the Prius name actually mean? If you'd brushed up on your Latin then you'd know it meant 'to go before'.

Mk4 Prius has 220bhp and close to hot hatch levels of acceleration

Sleek futuristic looks extend inside the Mk4's Uber driver-friendly cabin

> *“If you love cars for their design and engineering, you’ll have plenty of time for the Prius”*

The second-generation Prius was the first car in the world to be able to power its air conditioning even if the engine wasn’t running.

◂ complexity lurking within. Even in-period it was a fairly nondescript presence: its tried-and-tested three-box template was at odds with family-friendly contemporaries such as the audaciously angular ‘New Edge’ exterior of the first-generation Ford Focus.

Only when you climb aboard does the Prius start to reveal its status as a cutting-edge practitioner of the petrol-electric art. The squidgy seats trimmed in kitsch crushed velour are pure Tokyo taxi, plus there’s the expected expanse of hard grey plastic. But set high in the centre of the dashboard is a full LCD digital instrument cluster, while the centre console houses an actual touchscreen.

In many respects the OG hybrid car feels bang up to date to drive, which is largely due to the fact that any current hybrid Toyota is running essentially the same powertrain. Pull the chunky, dashboard-mounted gear selector into drive and squeeze the throttle, and the Toyota pulls away in silent EV mode.

Push the accelerator a little harder and the engine fires into life, while pinning it into the carpet for maximum forward motion results in revs being held somewhere around peak torque as the power splitter feeds the generator’s demand for maximum electricity (it’s this behaviour that hoodwinked many to assume the Prius had a conventional CVT transmission).

With a combined 98bhp on tap, progress is leisurely. The ICE has to be worked hard, but the uninterrupted, EV-style delivery and the option of enhanced regenerative braking with the B mode gives this Prius surprisingly contemporary vibes. It’s refined, too, with the 1.5-litre motor’s efforts being suppressed enough not to grate even when pressing on.

According to the trip computer it’s also returning an easy 50mpg-plus, despite being driven fairly briskly. Although, like many

Mk1 Prius’s innocuous saloon body belied the innovative tech beneath

HYBRID HISTORY LESSON

The Prius can comfortably lay claim to the title of world’s first mass-produced hybrid car, but the idea of combining internal combustion and electricity goes back much further than Toyota’s 1997 debut. In fact, rail locomotive designers were filing patents for petrol-electric-powered locomotives as far back as 1889, while in 1901 Ferdinand Porsche launched his Mixte, which used a small engine to charge the batteries that powered the car’s novel hub-mounted motors. It wasn’t until the 1970s that manufacturers started dabbling with the tech seriously, although many of these, like the Porsche, were technically range-extenders. It was Volkswagen that came closest to gazumping Toyota with its plug-in diesel-electric Golf Elektro Hybrid in 1987. Like the Prius, its wheels could be driven with either the combustion engine or electric motor. However, despite winning awards, it never made it past the pre-production phase, and it wasn’t until 2014 that a true hybrid Golf was launched.

hybrids, the inconsistent transition from regenerative to friction braking makes it almost impossible to slow smoothly in a hurry.

However, it's the chassis that really dates the car. Its slow-witted steering, skinny-tyred deficit of grip and loose body control prove to be a reminder of a time when, sports cars aside, Toyotas were faithful and functional but rarely fun. Still, the upshot is a nicely absorbent – if floaty – ride that seems pretty well suited to today's scarred road surfaces.

Yet it's easy to see why the Prius succeeded. Despite its astonishingly complicated powertrain, it's easy to drive, comfortable, spacious and, crucially, extremely reliable and cost-effective to run. So it was no surprise when second- and third-generation models arrived over the coming years.

The looks became more arresting and there was the addition of more power-dense lithium ion batteries and even a plug-in option, but the basic recipe remained the same. When the Mk4 Prius arrived in 2016 it was built on the brand's TNGA architecture, which also meant a decent dose of driver engagement.

Even so, when that car's production run came to an end in 2022, Toyota UK decided against bringing its replacement to our shores. With its C-HR crossover and collection of Corollas, the manufacturer reckoned it had all its hybrid bases covered, that there was no room on the price lists for a Prius. Then late last year Toyota relented, reinstating the plug-in version in showrooms.

Compared with its dumpy ancestor, the sleek new car is a real feast for the eyes. Snapper Jack Harrison suggests that our test car's sunny hue and teardrop profile give it the look of a lemon, but to this tester it's a visual treat. Stick some flush wheel covers on and it could have passed as a futuristic automotive background model in Blade Runner 2049. This attention to detail extends to its engineering.

Today's Prius is still roomy, with a slightly more upmarket feel

Mk1 interior's crushed velour offsets all the hard grey plastic trim

The latest hybrid system works in much the same way as ever, but it has been honed and refined for enhanced power and efficiency. Moreover, despite greater safety, a stiffer shell and a larger lithium ion battery that gives a claimed EV range of 53 miles, the Toyota tips the scales at as little as 1545kg, making it a flyweight in a world full of two-tonne-plus EVs and SUVs.

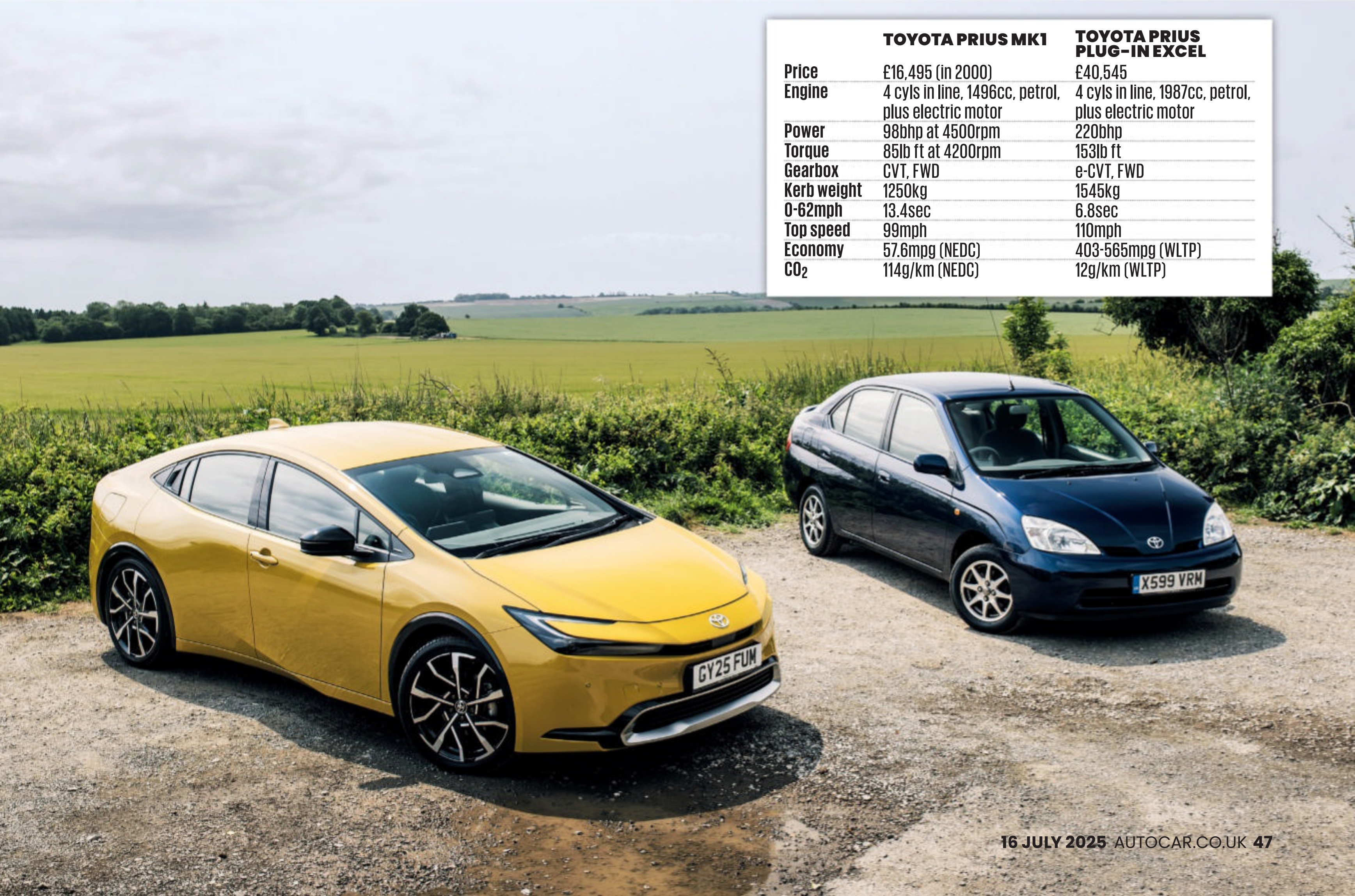
And this is all before you consider the way it drives. With 220bhp available it accelerates with the eagerness of a hot hatch, and the relationship between throttle, motor, engine and power delivery is now carefully honed to deliver a more natural feel with almost none of the elastic-feeling CVT lag.

There's also a rare fluidity to the chassis, which allows the car to scythe quickly and accurately through corners yet ride the lumps and bumps with impressive deftness, even on our example's larger 19in rims. Better still, the brakes are now brilliant, offering a firm pedal and a progressive action. This is a genuinely satisfying car to steer, one that might just tempt you to abandon the well-worn groove of your commute and seek a more interesting alternative back home.

If you love cars for their innovative design and engineering as much as you do for the way they go down the road, then you'll have plenty of time for the Prius. And as with the older models, once you've tuned into the hybrid's way of doing things there's a peculiar satisfaction in getting the best out of it. Moreover, in the clarity of its thinking and unwillingness to follow the herd, it captures the spirit of Citroën at the height of its hydropneumatic pomp, or Saab at its single-minded best.

After 25 years and millions of sales, the Prius doesn't need to justify its existence: like it or loathe it, the Toyota is a bona fide success. Who knows what the next quarter century holds for the Prius? But whatever happens we should pay it our dues and recognise this hybrid trailblazer as one of the most influential cars yet produced. What we do know, though, is that if you're a minicab driver, you've never had it so good.

	TOYOTA PRIUS MK1	**TOYOTA PRIUS PLUG-IN EXCEL**
Price	£16,495 (in 2000)	£40,545
Engine	4 cyls in line, 1496cc, petrol, plus electric motor	4 cyls in line, 1987cc, petrol, plus electric motor
Power	98bhp at 4500rpm	220bhp
Torque	85lb ft at 4200rpm	153lb ft
Gearbox	CVT, FWD	e-CVT, FWD
Kerb weight	1250kg	1545kg
0-62mph	13.4sec	6.8sec
Top speed	99mph	110mph
Economy	57.6mpg (NEDC)	403-565mpg (WLTP)
CO_2	114g/km (NEDC)	12g/km (WLTP)



"I always thought: why can't Aston make it work?"

Adrian Hallmark has left the security of Bentley to become CEO at Aston Martin – and he's relishing the challenge. **JAMES ATTWOOD** meets him

Adrian Hallmark didn't need to join Aston Martin. In his early sixties and in sight of retirement, he "loved" his job as CEO of Bentley. So why leave the stability of the Volkswagen Group to join an independent manufacturer with a rocky recent history and which has historically struggled to return a profit?

"I like a challenge," says Hallmark. "Where I'd been, I had reached the point where I had to do the same again as we had just done. I could have easily done that and then tumbled off to the beach in a few years."

Hallmark doesn't seem like much of a beach person. Automotive CEOs rarely are; they're too driven to enjoy lounging on a towel. So when the chance for one last big challenge arose last year, Hallmark couldn't resist.

"I've always been frustrated by the lack of success at Aston Martin, even though as a competitor I didn't want it to be strong," he says. "I've always looked at Aston and thought: 'Why can't you make it work?' Especially in the past five years, you've had to try pretty hard not to be successful if you're a luxury brand.

"As a last hurrah, rather than repeating what I've done in the same company for 14 years [split by a stint at Jaguar Land Rover], I'll do it somewhere else and try to do it twice as quickly. Bentley took three years, so I said we'll do this in 18 months, because we know what to do."

Speaking to a select group of media, Hallmark is remarkably confident about his ability to turn Aston around, despite the considerable struggles of his predecessors. That's partly because he has a template for how to revive the fortunes of a British luxury brand, having already done so during his six years at Bentley.

That template is, to hear Hallmark describe it, fairly basic: "Price [the cars right], cut costs, make money, it's that simple." Crucially, Hallmark wouldn't be starting from a blank slate. He suggests Aston Martin was better positioned when he first walked through the doors at Gaydon than when he took over as Bentley CEO in 2018. The investment consortium led by Lawrence Stroll, Autocar's Outstanding Leader for 2025, has brought much-needed financial stability and investment into the firm; much of its core product line-up – the DB12, Vantage, Vanquish and DBX – has recently been refreshed; its limited-run specials are proving popular; and its Valkyrie and Valhalla hypercars are finally reaching customers.

"The cars are fantastic, no question," asserts Hallmark. "It just proves that cars aren't the only answer, because they're already there ▸

Addressing the emissions issue

As a relatively low-volume manufacturer, Aston Martin isn't subject to the ZEV mandate that would otherwise require it to sell a set percentage of EVs in the UK. But electrification is coming, and while Hallmark confirms that "we'll have a BEV, maybe two" arriving in the coming years, there is still much uncertainty in the longer term. Given the struggles to warm buyers up to EVs, Hallmark advocates for more freedom.

"We've got to address the climate issue, no question," he says. "But the measures have got to be effective, and just displacing CO_2 doesn't help. We've always advocated giving us the challenge to reduce CO_2 by a set amount. It could be lightweighting, or renewable fuels, electric, or hydrogen. There will be all kinds of inventions. Don't just say 'this engine or that battery by that date'."

Reversing production inefficiencies will be key to growing profits

Hallmark swapped Bentley CEO role for a new life at Gaydon

“The downside is you’re on your own; the upside is you’re on your own”

◂ and it's still not profitable. If you spend too much to develop them, spend too much to build them, waste money and can't get the price you ask, you lose money."

In terms of making an instant impact, he laughs: "I'm blessed with inefficiency." He cites the speaker grille of the DB12, Vantage and Vanquish: it's currently made from a machined and laser-cut piece of solid aluminium, and it costs £1250. A piece of stamped sheet metal costs £80. "Why?" he asks rhetorically. "The cut part is no better when machined from solid, so it's just wasting huge amounts of metal and time," says Hallmark. "There are multiple examples like that on every car."

Some of those costs weren't addressed because of a belief that the solution was to grow sales. "We had a plan that drew a line from 5000 cars per year to 10,000 over a five-year period," he explains. "But you have to read the market, not the line of a graph. When Ferrari was selling 7000 cars per year before their flotation, they were extremely profitable.

"We've now drawn a straight line and assumed we can't sell any more cars than we currently do. So how can we make great profits on that basis and then reverse-engineer the company accordingly?"

Aston's profitability struggles are, insists Hallmark, for different reasons than they appear from the outside: "We didn't struggle because we didn't have money, despite what the analysts said. We struggled because we spent too much. It's like everybody thought they were a billionaire, just because Lawrence is."

Hallmark says Aston's overheads have doubled in the past four years, but an ongoing programme to restructure everything could lead the company to make a net profit this year, for the first time in almost two decades. But Aston's struggles haven't just been related to high costs.

"Post-Covid there's been like a post-war spending binge, the likes of which I've never experienced," he says. "There are four times more millionaires and billionaires than 20 years ago. That's why luxury has gone bonkers, and Aston has just sat there like a flat line with all this

Aston has been held back by a too-slow turnaround of models

Why hypercars have value for Hallmark

The project to develop the incredible Adrian Newey-penned Valkyrie hypercar was signed off long before Adrian Hallmark joined, but the CEO wouldn't rule out doing it again.

"Would we enter another hypercar programme with no idea what it's going to cost, how long it's going to take and whether it will ever make money?" he asks. "Yeah, we would." But don't expect such projects to arrive on a regular cadence: "It's the sort of thing you do when the mood takes you, like a composer."

Aston's second mid-engined hypercar, the Valhalla, will also arrive this year. Asked if he would have signed off on that project, Hallmark says: "Absolutely I would have. Although if we'd known the price of the McLaren W1 and Ferrari F80, it wouldn't cost £850,000."

Those two cars, for reference, start from around £2 million and £3 million respectively. "The Valhalla must be the cheapest hypercar pro rata ever made," quips Hallmark. "But the car is phenomenal, and it's entirely bespoke."

In other words, expect more mid-engined hypercars in the future – but if you missed out on a Valhalla, you've probably missed the chance of bagging a bargain.

Hallmark says Aston could have charged more for the Valhalla

> **“I used to think: come on, we’ve all cracked the code. What are you doing?”**

noise going on underneath. I used to think: ‘Don’t get it right when I’m a competitor, but come on, we’ve all cracked the code, what are you doing?’”

Again, for Hallmark the solutions are simple and proven. The first? More product: “Look at other luxury brands: every two years they give a reason to change every model. The Ferrari and Lamborghini change cycle is roughly half ours.”

Those mega-rich customers Hallmark is targeting want to change their car every 18 to 24 months, and if it’s a limited-run version with stronger residual values, even better. But, he says, Aston hasn’t offered that: “We have a five-year plan for the Vantage where the only variant was the roadster. The latest-generation Porsche 911 has 24 versions – 24 derivatives in five and a half years. We’ve got to innovate with the current range, and that will allow us to go to existing customers and get more repeat business.”

At the same time, Hallmark is leading a push to overhaul Aston’s dealership network to uplift it to the level of flagship stores, with big-screen configurators and the ability to show off numerous customisation options: greatly increasing the number offered on each model is another planned move to boost revenue.

In Hallmark’s previous role at Bentley he had the security blanket of the Volkswagen Group, which surely helped the brand benefit from the economies of scale of being part of one of the world’s largest car firms. Put that to Hallmark and he smiles ruefully.

Limited-run models like the Valour are a good profit driver

Hallmark is trying to do what he did at Bentley – but in just half the time

“For us to develop a car is less than a third of the cost of the synergies that other companies get when they’re in a big group,” he says. “Most of the components that come from German groups are developed in Germany. The average cost per hour for an engineer or line worker there is three times [that in] the UK.” That means costs are about three times more than they would be in the UK. “And you’ve then got rules of how they allocate costs across different brands, and you pay your share,” adds Hallmark.

Those costs, he says, continue down the supply chain, given that German groups use primarily German suppliers. And while Aston Martin does use some German suppliers, notably Mercedes-AMG powertrains, Hallmark says: “Yes, we have to pay to access engines and gearboxes, but it’s a fraction of what you would pay as part of a big group.

“The downside is you’re on your own; the upside is you’re on your own.” He gives an example from his time at Bentley: “We had to get the double-clutch gearbox that goes in the Flying Spur to work like a conventional gearbox for a luxury saloon. We could have developed a brand-new gearbox for the cost of modifying the clutches and software to make it silky-smooth.”

For the first time in years, Hallmark has the freedom to choose. “I’ve not done this, but it must be like getting divorced and getting back in the swim,” he says. “Suddenly you step out of this protected environment and get all wild and native. Instead of being locked in this system, you’ve got the freedom to choose suppliers, and a lot of people want to do business.”

There are challenges to that: Hallmark notes that the vast sums invested in electrification have led to hugely established automotive parts suppliers collapsing. That has already caused problems for Aston: at one stage a third of cars produced were parked due to missing parts. That has since improved to 98% completion.

As with some of the other issues Hallmark has already addressed at Aston, that’s not complicated: unfinished cars can’t be sold. “Just becoming normal will make us successful,” notes Hallmark. Of course, he didn’t join Aston to settle for ‘success’. If that was the limit of his ambition, he would still be at Bentley, or perhaps on that beach towel already. Hallmark is working to set the firm up for the next decade, with Aston Martin’s first EVs, more product, more options and more specials.

“Becoming normal is not enough,” he says. “I don’t want to work for more than five years. I might say something different in four years when I’m 66, but I don’t want to be doing this forever.”

But the confidence comes from the reason he moved to Gaydon in the first place. “The special project cars were the thing that convinced me to join,” says Hallmark. “There aren’t many brands that can sell 100-plus cars at £2 million to £3 million each. That is phenomenal, and I was jealous of it. If I can get this core business to operate like other core businesses and keep the specials, then we’ve got a Ferrari-beater.” A

Proof that the Nürburgring 24 Hours is a race like no other: when a red flag descends due to a freak power outage, pausing the action for two hours, vast swathes of the 280,000-strong crowd of spectators barely even notice.

Red flags often fall at the 'Ring's annual endurance race, typically for tumultuous weather or thick fog. Its 53rd edition last month ran amid a stifling heatwave, however, and the lengthy pause in action arrived after just nine laps and with racing conditions being otherwise perfect. Yet with many spectators camping trackside, those deepest in the Eifel forest having been there almost a week, a hushed track did very little to suppress their party spirit.

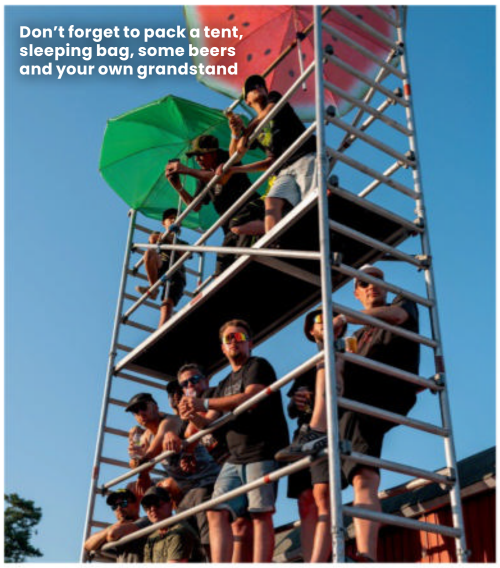
We know because we joined them. Setting up camp beside halo corners such as Karussell or Brünnchen requires military planning and a much freer schedule than our own. But turning up late on Friday evening, less than 24 hours before the start of the race, still perched us right by the more modern grand prix circuit and its copious shops and facilities – with free shuttle buses running spectators to and from the most dramatic viewpoints around the Nordschleife.

It's among these woods where the N24 truly is a motorsport event without equal. A cursory glance around Pflanzgarten gives you a taster of the jubilant atmosphere fostered by several days of qualifying and support races; several minutes' wander anticlockwise to Brünnchen, clinging close to the catch fencing as the race cars buzz towards you, sees the pounding bass levels deepen and the fan-built structures swell implausibly in their scale. By Wippermann these makeshift pubs, clubs and spectator stands tower above you, shrouded by coloured flares and crowned by lines of clearly inebriated spectators, beer in one hand and water pistol in the other, ready to soak the (relatively) sober Brits in walking boots innocently exploring –

Fans are enthusiastic, but the underdogs tend to elicit the biggest cheers

A postcard from the Nürburgring 24 Hours

The world's most infamous race circuit serves up a truly unique endurance race. **STEPHEN DOBIE** sets up camp



Don't forget to pack a tent, sleeping bag, some beers and your own grandstand

although when the race is set against 30deg C heat, such mischief is quite welcome…

Helpfully, each erection seems to have a bank of TVs strapped to it and showing race coverage – although with 136 cars spread across 20 classes to keep up with, we won't judge anyone for not meticulously monitoring race progress. In the thick of the GT3 cars up front, local heroes Manthey Racing tend to be favourites among both bookies and fans, although their striking 'Grello' 911 finished second this year. It was in fact first past the chequered flag on Sunday afternoon, but a 100-second penalty for an earlier incident handed 2025 N24 honours to the Rowe Racing BMW M4 GT3.

Yet some of the loudest cheers are reserved for the cars that are battling not only their rivals but the circuit itself. Whether it's a ratty old 3 Series with gaffer tape strewn across its body, a Porsche Cayman crabbing sideways as it crawls into the pits or the heroic Opel Manta 'Foxtail', which raced here for years and is now lovingly recreated via pricey 1:18-scale models.

The more retro entries have since moved to the Classic support race, a beguiling N24 warm-up contest on Saturday morning, but true David versus Goliath moments still pepper the headline event. None do so more palpably this year than the plucky Ollis Garage Dacia Logan, which sent ripples of whoops and cheers through crowds every lap it completed. It's easy to get enveloped by drivers' stories without getting bogged down in their split times, especially when a bunch of mates trudging through the forest can so easily relate to the crews of cars they could, in an only slightly alternative universe, run and race themselves.

While the Nürburgring attracts plenty of mixed responses thanks to the infamy (or perhaps ambivalence) attached to its endless road car lap records, camping at its big-ticket race is the perfect tonic, and any 'Ring fatigue quickly makes way for 'Ring fever – even when there's no *actual* racing to spectate…

PLANNING AHEAD

Camping out at the N24 is simple. All you truly need to do ahead of time is buy a weekend ticket for the race; we got ours with a week's notice for £63. Camping typically can't be booked in advance and is instead allocated upon arrival through a shouty PA. Really committed folk arrive days ahead and build scarcely believable structures in the forest, but you can also sling a cheap tent in the back of your car and rock up on the eve of race day. Figure on roughly £40 per person for a weekend's camping. But bring plenty of euros: you can't pay for the official campsites with card or phone (at least as we write…). Most drink and food stalls prefer cash, too.

Spectator camps have an 'end of days' vibe, but it's all good-natured stuff

OLD-WEEN
FANTA

WHAT TO BRING

The eclectic nature of the N24 grid is reflected in – even surpassed by – the cars filling the surrounding roads and campsites. 'Bring what you love' is the best advice, but hardier is better if you wish to explore the depths of the forest and set up camp somewhere truly dramatic. Hence our Dacia Duster and Latitude roof tent combo, which won repeated thumbs up and cheers given the plucky little Logan chasing GT3 cars to the delight of an adoring crowd. Latitude prices start at £1195, but the flexibility of its set-ups may prove priceless: by the time we arrived, camping spots were mostly hard ground and steep inclines – enemies of a traditional tent but easily accommodated by the slick mechanism atop our Duster (the stepladder supports and self-levels the tent). It also leaves you with far more boot space for vital beer and BBQ supplies.

Latitude roof tent is a perfect if pricey N24 camping solution

DAFYDD WOOD, MATT COLLETT

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they’ve done

“The Bentley reveals its poise and vigour when you want it to”

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 18,446**

BENTLEY BENTAYGA

Our temporary dalliance with luxury motoring is over. Will we miss it?

WHY WE RAN IT In facelifted form, is this SUV still the pinnacle of British luxury motoring?

“I’m a long way from a Bentley,” joked a guest recently on Radio 2 in a conversation with Sara Cox on his mode of transport to the studio. That quip sums up quite neatly Bentley’s positioning: the pinnacle – and a conspicuous badge – of success in a capitalist world.

As I mused in the introduction to this special long-termer, our Bentayga shows the impressive breadth of what Bentley has become in the modern age. If you’re a wealthy sexagenarian, you can choose an understated metallic grey Continental GT to enjoy the fruits of your life’s hard work, but if you’re a super-affluent thirtysomething – and there are many globally – you can specify something slightly more standout, such as this model, complete with a £25k Mulliner paint option.

Having run this Bentayga for a few months, I can confirm that the special feeling of driving a car from the upper echelons of automotive desirability is slow to wear off – although I’m mindful the ‘average’ owner of one of these will have multiple high-end cars. That would take the shine off a bit, I guess, but I’d wager it would be hard to shake entirely the sense of opulence and singularity in a car like this.

As I’ve documented regularly through previous reports, the only real downside to this car is other people’s reactions to it. Quite a lot of hostility and bad road manners get directed the Bentley’s way, but there have been a few friendly encounters too.

The idea of running a Bentayga as a daily driver might be laughable to some, but it will nonetheless be used on those terms by many, and actually I quickly adjusted to it being used in that way by me.

Parallel parking on my street was tricky given the car’s width and low-profile tyres, but I’m pretty well versed in the art, and it was never too much of a bind – although I’ll admit that a few days in a Renault 5 was a refreshing break on this front.

And then there’s driving the Bentayga in the suburbs. Happily, while it clearly is a significant chunk of metal, I found it less cumbersome than I expected a 5.1m-long, 2.2m-wide £258k SUV would be. I’m always careful in every car I drive, needless to say, but never more so than in the Bentley, and yet in all my travels there were only a couple of width restrictors that really made me jittery. Those and the Eurotunnel, of course, although going for the bigger carriage upgrade made all the difference.

SECOND OPINION

Having borrowed the Bentayga for a weekend, half a mile into my trip I wanted to turn round and hand it back. Too big, too brash. Too nerve-wrecking to drive on narrow city streets, too much judgement from others. But once I’d properly settled into that luxurious interior, I stopped caring about both the size and the side eyes. What a magical, special thing. I still can’t believe Rachel drove it onto LeShuttle, though. Much respect. **JA**

Luxurious trim, cosseting seats and a good mix of tech and physical controls

It's no full-on sports car, but the Bentley can be fun on a twisting road

Shift paddles add engagement when the mood takes

If the stature of the car is slightly unsettling, the opposite can be said of the feeling you get when sliding into the driver's seat of the Bentley, which is comforting and reassuring every time. I don't think I'd have ever specified a dark green and tan interior, but I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed its understated yet distinct ambience.

The in-car tech is also intuitive and easy to get along with. There's a neatly arranged mix of buttons and knobs for key actions, along with a user-friendly touchscreen, and this mix of analogue and digital feels optimum. Some of those super-affluent thirtysomethings might say Bentley has been behind the tech curve by retaining so many of those physical controls, but given that many mainstream brands are now reintroducing them after migrating key functions to the touchscreen, it appears the Crewe maker might have been right all along.

Parking the Bentayga could be a chore

I have mentioned before that I recognised the Bentayga's steering wheel switchgear from my previous long-termer, the Audi A3. Clocking those shared components was a jarring reminder of the realities of modern-day car making, but a fleeting one all the same and the only hint I was given in our time together of Bentley's German parentage. One too many, some might argue, but no one's going to mistake this lavishly made car for a glorified Volkswagen Touareg.

The Bentley is as enjoyable to drive as it is to sit in. Yes, it's a 2416kg SUV, so it's never going to have the dynamics of a Continental, but as you would hope, the Bentayga, particularly in this S form, reveals its poise and vigour when you want it to, as well as having a plush ride. Sensible me opted mostly for Comfort mode, but when I had the chance to stretch its legs and flick the shift paddles in Sport on an open country road, I enjoyed every second.

Such is the pace of development that as we say farewell to the S, so too does Bentley. The new Bentayga Speed is essentially a replacement for – and upgrade to – the S, using the brand's well-known performance badge. The new model has the same V8, but uprated to 641bhp for 0-62mph in 3.6sec, with a more focused chassis set-up.

Based on our time in the S, the Speed will inevitably be the latest in-demand model in Bentley's exclusive stable.

RACHEL BURGESS

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

TEST DATA

BENTLEY BENTAYGA V8 S

MILEAGE

At start 16,100
At end 18,446

PRICES

List price new £197,300
List price now £197,300
Price as tested £258,185

OPTIONS

Orange Flame by Mulliner satin paint £23,895, Naim premium audio system £7065, Bentayga Styling Specification £6885, Touring Specification £5800, Five Seat Comfort Specification £4550, Bentayga Black Line Specification £4535, Precision Diamond Quilt Specification £4325, All Terrain Specification £3830

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 22.1mpg
Fuel tank 85 litres
Test average 21.5mpg
Test best 24.7mpg
Test worst 8.1mpg
Real-world range 402 miles

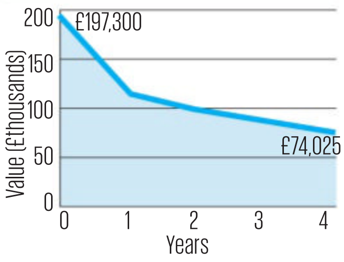
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

Engine V8, 3996cc, twin-turbo, petrol
0-62mph 4.5sec
Max power 542bhp at 6000rpm
Max torque 568lb ft at 1960-4500rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD
Boot 484 litres
Wheels 22in, alloy
Tyres 285/40 ZR22
Kerb weight 2416kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire £4151.87 pcm
CO_2 296g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Fuel costs £745.22
Running costs including fuel £745.22
Cost per mile 32 pence
Faults None

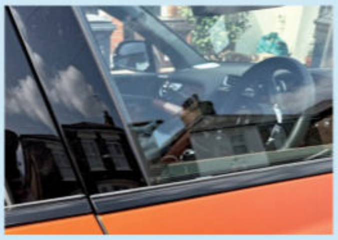
DEPRECIATION



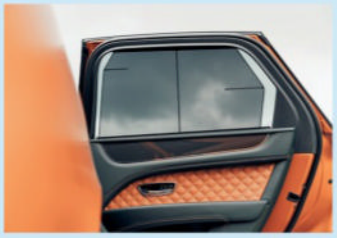
PREVIOUS REPORTS

16 Apr, 30 Apr, 28 May, 4 Jun, 18 Jun, 2 Jul

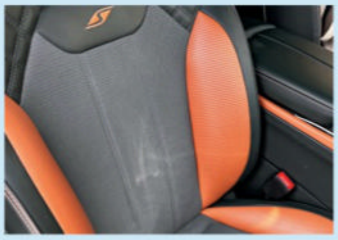
LOVE IT



SOFT-CLOSE DOORS
Small details are often the most enjoyable. These soft-closing doors have been truly indispensable. I know, I'm spoilt.



REAR SHADE COVERS
I've bought a few too many Chinese-made five-quid synthetic rear-window sun shades. The Bentayga's are in-built and a big hit with my son.



LUMBAR SUPPORT
My annoying lower back problems are exacerbated by long journeys in most cars. Not with these luxurious seats.

ASSISTANCE SYSTEMS
It feels utterly safe and tech-forward yet has some of the least intrusive ADAS I've experienced in recent years.

LOATHE IT

REACTION FROM OTHERS
Can someone please let me out of a junction, just once? This big orange SUV isn't hard to miss.

DACIA DUSTER

A swap for a 4x4 Duster gives the chance to test its off-road ability

MILEAGE 5102 **WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** To see if a sub-£27,000 price tag really does give you all the car you'll ever need

Duster 130 surprises with its ability away from the asphalt

It's a sunny weekend and I'm awake early, coffee in hand and up for an adventure. But while my normal go-to might be to jump in the sports car and blitz down some B-roads, I've got another idea in mind: let's off-road.

While my Duster 140 is having a break in the workshop being fitted with a cool bit of kit that I will talk about another time – hint, it will be great for festival season – Dacia has handed me the keys to a 130. It has a five-speed manual gearbox, a 128bhp mild-hybrid powertrain and, most importantly for my Sunday jaunt, four-wheel drive.

Autocar photographer and former fellow south coast-dweller Jack Harrison pointed me in the direction of Corfe Castle in Dorset, which is where we now find ourselves.

Just half an hour from Poole, the landscape here is awash with green rolling hills as far as the eye can see. Heading down a narrow B-road, I turn onto a short gravel track, at the end of which I'm met with a large metal gate adorned with a sign that says I must shut it or the cows will escape. It feels odd to be here with a car, but despite the odd walker staring quizzically at me, this is a perfectly legal byway I can carefully drive along. There's even a sign clearly saying: 'Green Lane Association, byway open to all traffic.' So I open the gate, drive through and close it behind me. We're in.

Ahead lies our first test: a slight hill strewn with small craters and a herd of cows. I twist the mode selector to Lock (to lock the central differential into 4x4 mode) and off we go. And you know what? This is a lot easier than I was expecting. Okay, it's hardly the Moab desert, but the amount of grip I'm finding with the Duster is impressive. Its light steering, which I'm already a fan of on the road, allows for much-needed quick corrections – especially when I go into a pothole that I didn't know was there and which throws me in the direction of what looks like the chief cow. At least the brakes are also working well. It then dawns on me that the Duster has parking cameras that work up to 12mph, and I could have used those for pothole spotting.

Next up: some grass. I know, perilous. But it's steep, and I can really see myself getting stuck halfway up. But once again I've

"It's steep, and I can see myself getting stuck halfway up"

underestimated the Duster. I know this isn't the hardest piece of off-roading to tackle, yet the ease with which the Duster seems to dispatch Dorset's grassy inclines is quite exceptional. I breeze up and pull over at the top, feeling very kingly as I survey Corfe Castle below.

As I get back in the car, I receive a funny 'you shouldn't be up here' look from a couple of walkers, but given the heat of the day, perhaps it's more a look of jealousy as I enjoy the Duster's air-con-cooled cabin.

Hill descent mode on – just in case – and I reach the bottom of the slope and turn right. Ahead is a trail that is no wider than the Duster and a badly damaged track full of deep crevasse-like cavities. Luckily, with a breakover angle of 24deg (that's more than even a Jeep Wrangler has), I avoid scuffing the underside and push on through the next gate as branches begin chattering against the wing mirrors: yes, it is as tight as it looks. The Duster rides through the potholes, though, and while the gravel underwheel is compromising grip, there is still some to be found.

Another gate leads to a steep gravel track, strewn with cows and with, concerningly, a rather perilous drop on one side. While building the courage to continue, a problem emerges: there's no room to get out of the car to open said gate. As if by magic, a cyclist appears, and she very kindly opens the gate. I thank her but when I go to pull gently away there's only wheelspin. That's embarrassing. Try again: wheelspin accompanied by the smell of burning clutch. Then I notice the Duster has defaulted back to its normal driving mode and unlocked the central diff after I switched it off momentarily before the cyclist showed up. I'm a dummy. I reset it to Lock and, as if by some more magic, I'm able to chug up the hill, eyes fixed ahead and very much not on the cliff edge to the left. I reach the top and, again, stop to admire another beautiful view. This really is a great way to spend a sunny weekend.

On my way back down I'm feeling really quite triumphant, but then my ego takes a punch to the throat as a ratty 2010-plate Volkswagen Touareg comes bounding up the trail I had ascended so carefully. I move over so it can pass and the excited pair inside give me a wave as they crash their way up. That was definitely a wave goodbye rather than a wave hello…

After passing my herd of bovine best mates from earlier, I reach the entrance gate and get out to inspect the Duster: no scuffs, no marks, no dents. Brilliant.

To think I've just spent my afternoon tackling an array of routes – some challenging, some steep – on a beautiful day with gorgeous views, and all while spending less than £15 in fuel (which includes getting here from home and back) in my daily driver that costs as little as £26,000 is, quite frankly, ridiculous.

While those more moneyed than I can afford to drive their Porsche 911s to their local circuit for a track day, rag it around and then drive home, this is my budget version – and I don't need a new set of tyres afterwards. Next time I'll just remember to take a picnic.

WILL RIMELL

DACIA
NA74 SVW
Will was lucky: a lack of rain meant mud and wet grass wasn't an issue

Switchable off-road modes make a real difference to the Duster

Cows have more right to be off road than cars, so treat them with respect

Can't see the wood: green lanes live up to their name in summer

LOVE IT

CAST THEE OUT, ADAS

The Duster has a button to the right of the steering wheel. Click twice and those annoying advanced driver assistance functions (speed limit, lane centring and the like) turn off.

LOATHE IT

AUTO BEATS MANUAL

The five-speed manual gearbox in this Duster 130 4x4 makes the car feel a lot less refined than the clutchless four-speed automatic in my usual Duster 140.

TEST DATA

DACIA DUSTER HYBRID 140 JOURNEY

Price new £26,050 **Price as tested** £26,700 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 56.1mpg **Last seen** 9.7.25

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will.rimell@haymarket.com

MG CYBERSTER

If you feel it's short of head room, and some do, there's an easy solution

MILEAGE 4123
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Can a two-seat roadster/GT/sports car be both satisfying to own and electric?

As I write, it's quite warm and dry out so I've been popping the roof down on the Cyberster as often as not. This doesn't take long, and can be done at up to 28mph, which means if it gets too toasty for my wee baldy heid, I can put it back up again without much bother.

I've had a letter or two about the driving position, because the MG's is relatively high in the roadster scheme of things: the battery is underneath the floor, so you can feel like you're sitting more on than in the car. Mind you, the MGF had a similar issue and this car does say '100th anniversary' on the side. I'm not sure it's a deliberate intention to continue that part of the MG heritage, but still. It feels on-brand.

I don't find the driving position such a bother as one reader, shorter than I am, who simply couldn't put up with it. I'm 5ft 10in and my head isn't into the headlining with the roof up, and I'm looking cleanly underneath the screen's header rail with it down. Maybe I have the seat more reclined?

It's something worth considering if you're thinking about a Cyberster, though, particularly if you are tall, because as in, say, a Jaguar F-Type, the seat doesn't slide so far back, and the further back you go the less reclined you can have it.

Anyway, what this means for me is that, roof down, the wind isn't too much in what was once hair. I get that pleasing open-air feeling, the ability in traffic to look up at passing aeroplanes or red kites, without too much buffeting.

There's a wind deflector and I've been leaving it in place because it's not hard to look through it via the interior mirror. It's like looking through a fine fly screen or something like that.

LOVE IT

PADDLE UP

Selecting drive modes, or the amount of regen, is a doddle. There's a paddle behind each side of the steering wheel.

LOATHE IT

ONE LUMP OR TWO?

The seats have lumbar support, but even the least amount is too lumpy for me.

Storage is decent for a roadster; wind deflector (left) is easy to remove

It sits between the two roll bars and can easily be pulled free, or relocated, with one hand. So if it bothers you, it's a doddle to get it out of the way. It's even marked 'front' on, er, the front, so you know which way around it goes when it comes to putting it back quickly.

I wouldn't recommend trying to put it back in place on the move, but you can easily pull it free while driving, although with roof down I'm not sure you'd want to. Having it in place doesn't make too much difference to the amount of buffeting around your head, but it does seem to reduce the amount of turbulence swirling around in the middle of the cabin, curiously. Without it in, I'd want to secure any valuable receipts. Keeping the side windows up also considerably reduces turbulence, so unless I'm mooching around town, I tend to keep those up too.

The easiest stowage for the deflector is probably in the netted cargo area behind the seats. It's where the emergency manual handles for the otherwise-electric door releases are too. You couldn't fit a set of golf clubs back there, but for oddments stowage it's a handy 'accessible, but not in the cabin' space for things you might normally put in the door pockets.

It does have those too. It's just that they're small and they snap shut, because the doors raise through 90deg and it would throw my sunscreen and window cleaner onto the floor if they had conventional door pockets. Actually, for a two-seat roadster overall, luggage volume is pretty good. The boot, if not deep, is quite long, and while all you'll find under the bonnet is a vast black plastic shield with compartments for fluids and battery, it's not like anything with an engine has space there either.

Having the roof down, or the audio up loud, also means there's more ambient noise kicking around so you can't hear some of the MG's more irritating chimes and bongs. I'll expand on those another time because I think they deserve a report of their own.

MATT PRIOR

TEST DATA

MG CYBERSTER GT
Price new £59,995 **Price as tested** £60,540
Faults Flat 12V battery **Expenses** None
Range 246 miles **Economy** 3.2mpkWh
Last seen 9.7.25

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matthew.prior@haymarket.com

RENAULT 5

First impressions have thrown up some surprises

MILEAGE 5133
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To discover if Renault's retro-infused EV hit is as good to live with as it is to look at

Mini and 5 share a wheel-at-each-corner kind of dynamic

There's been so much hoopla (justified) about the new Renault 5 that it's almost a relief to start using our Iconic version as a car, as opposed to a rolling exhibit and a constant conversation piece.

Mind you, part of that exhibit thing is our own fault. We're the ones who specified this pretty little car in Pop Yellow – the yellowest metallic yellow you'll ever see, made all the more vivid by its contrast with a black roof.

You'll note I've called the 5 a little car: opinions vary on that. Being an EV, it's taller than your old-school Fiesta or Clio because there's a great big battery beneath. And with the mirrors extended it's just over 2.0m wide, which makes it about an inch wider than the current petrol Clio.

But in the dimension that matters most to size when you're driving, it's only 3922mm long, a dimension that actually undercuts many ICE superminis and makes a nice change from the general direction of EV progress, which is towards structures that are both much bigger and much heavier. Even the 5's kerb weight of 1450kg, admittedly shocking against an original Clio's 935kg, isn't so bad when you consider that well over one-third of that mass comprises battery cells. It still seems fair to call this a little car.

The driving position plays along. We've all become used to the idea that battery height under the car means you tend to sit on, not in, a smallish EV, yet because of the 5's seat design and fascia mounting height, you get the feeling you're in a sporty, bum-on-floor kind of car, a feeling that endures even if you do 200 miles, straight off the bat.

Which you can. At this time of the year, our bigger-motor, bigger-battery 5 delivers 230-240 miles of range pretty faithfully in give-and-take conditions on the open road. At a 70mph motorway cruise, it would be 170 miles, still okay in this era of improving charging infrastructure.

When you start to drive, the sporty impression stays. The 5 rides on big (18in) wheels and tyres and has them at each corner, Mini-style, so there's that genuine roller-skate feel to the handling. The car grips and points very well and hardly rolls. You're best to use a wet road to investigate the on-limit handling, which is nice, safe, mild understeer. Nobody's going to habitually hang the tail in one of these.

One surprise is the refinement. The ride may be towards the firmer side of supple but it is impressively quiet over bumps and generates only well-controlled road noise. That goes with low wind noise, too, and the impressive overall economy so far of 4.6mpkWh, even if you use the very decent acceleration regularly for joining fast-flowing traffic on motorways and A-roads.

All of this leaves you with the impression of a city car that's actually capable and comfortable out of town. My most surprising impression so far? Maturity. This new car feels durable, well built and ready for a long life. Although the 5 EV's ancient ancestors had many virtues, these were not among them.
STEVE CROPLEY

LOVE IT

THAT STYLING

It works for every eye that falls on it, reminding old admirers of the cheeky 5 original, while appealing to new arrivals as a piece of modern design.

LOATHE IT

AWKWARD STALK

The plastic selector stalk on the right of the steering column hardly fits the rest of the cabin's decent controls, and can feel vague and flimsy too.

TEST DATA

RENAULT 5 COMFORT RANGE ICONIC FIVE

Price new £28,995 **Price as tested** £30,195 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 240 miles **Economy** 4.6mpkWh **Last seen** 9.7.25

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steve.cropley@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS

Driver alerts
Side Assist
Exit warning system

CUPRA LEON ESTATE

Mileage 8271 **Last seen** 25.6.25
I'm down to the final few trips in 'my' beloved Leon and am building a list of things I'll miss about it. The stunning acceleration, fruity exhaust, pin-sharp handling and massive boot all rank highly, but currently up top is the easy-access speed limit warning siren deactivation switch. Two taps and the bong is gone. The wonders of modern ergonomics. **FP**

CITROEN E-C3

Mileage 1992 **Last seen** 9.7.25
For the most part, I like the ë-C3's interior. The dashboard materials are a soft fabric, the seats are well cushioned and supportive, and the buttons are sited conveniently. That said, I can't stand the shiny plastics on the centre console. They're a magnet for fingerprints and dust and are almost impossible to keep clean. **JW**

VOLVO EX30

Mileage 533 **Last seen** 9.7.25
I've had problems connecting my iPhone to the EX30 using Apple CarPlay. Normally, that would be a massive pain, but with Volvo's Google-based infotainment, I can stick to Google Maps for my navigation, log into Spotify to play the UK's finest podcast (see picture) and connect via Bluetooth for phone calls. And because they're native, they all work better than CarPlay. Google Maps even shows estimated charge levels on arrival at destinations. **JA**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A SKODA FABIA

A SUPERMINI FOR PEOPLE WITH MORE SENSE THAN MONEY

The Mk3 Fabia is shrewdness and value in compact four-wheeled form

Frugal, friendly and affordable, the third-generation Skoda Fabia is a great little hatchback that puts common sense and usability at the very heart of its driving experience.

The Mk3 Fabia doesn't look particularly dated, yet it was launched more than a decade ago, and prices for this smart supermini are starting to look unignorably attractive.

Today, you can pay as little as £1500 for a high-miler with plenty of battle scars but we found several decent mid-rung SE and range-topping SE L cars with reasonable mileage for around £6000. That's decent value, especially as SE cars get perks like Bluetooth, DAB radio, 15in alloys and air conditioning. SE L cars have an even better roster of kit, with climate control, 16in wheels and cruise control – and if you want a bit of chic, the Monte Carlo with its black alloys, panoramic roof and sporty bodykit is your best bet. Value is the name of the game here, clearly, but we would nevertheless advise steering clear of the basic, entry-level S.

The solid fit and finish of the Fabia's interior is pleasantly surprising at this end of the market. Sure, it doesn't have the same soft-touch materials as its cousin, the Volkswagen Polo, but it's well appointed, the touchscreen is a doddle to operate and there's plenty of buttons and switches to play with – and it's capacious up front too.

This pragmatic approach is applied to the rear, where there's just enough room for adults for short trips. The real highlight,

Cabin embodies the car: practical to use, roomy, comfy and well equipped

however, is the segment-leading 330-litre boot, which can house suitcases, pushchairs or a weekly shop without hassle. The lesser-spotted Fabia estate, now sadly departed, ramped up boot capacity to a whopping 530 litres.

While you can choose from a wide variety of petrol and diesel engines, you're likely to end up with one of the more prevalent 1.0 or 1.2-litre petrol engines. The early non-turbo 1.0-litre MPI can be had with 59bhp (a bit too sluggish for daily duties) or 74bhp (punchier but harder to find). So we would aim for one of the turbo 1.2 TSI units, specifically the 108bhp version (there's also an 89bhp one), which has enough grunt for motorway stints and comes with a six-speed manual gearbox. You will pay around £7500 for a 1.2 TSI with about 50,000 miles, but it will easily do 50mpg and some variants cost just £20 to tax annually.

The diesels are all 1.4-litre four-pots (74bhp, 89bhp or 104bhp). We would recommend a diesel only if your mileage is on the high side. You should get 60mpg (more on the motorway) and tax costs are low. Just be aware that they are rarer than petrol and were dropped when the Fabia was facelifted in 2018.

Engines aside, the Fabia is a grown-up supermini geared for ride comfort rather than driver engagement. It irons out lumps and bumps well and takes the edge off the sharpest road imperfections around town. It lacks the agility and body control of the best-handling small cars like the Ford Fiesta, but there's plenty of grip and it drives predictably at real-world speeds.

And whether you're pootling to the supermarket, or heading for the coast for a short getaway, the easy-going Fabia has plenty of 'big car' feel to make it a great all-round proposition – and for the price of a year's PCP on a new supermini, who can grumble with that?

SAM PHILLIPS

What we said then

21 JANUARY 2015

"The Fabia is probably a better telltale of the state of the Skoda brand than any of its other models. It's smart but anonymous to look at, classy but forgettable to drive. That said, it is tough to be bold in the supermini segment and, in the absence of originality, pragmatic buyers will happily accept this car's considerable practicality and quality, carefully hewn dynamic maturity, obliging ease of use and unquestionable value for money."

Crisp-lined Mk3 still looks fresh and irons out road imperfections well

"You'll pay around £7500 for a 50k-mile 1.2 TSI but it will easily do 50mpg and some cost £20 to tax"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

ANGIE BATSON

"After a hat-trick of Minis, and with grandchildren on the way, I needed something a bit more practical for boot space and rear-seat access. The answer came in the shape of a 20-plate Skoda Fabia: white, black roof and 12,000 miles on the clock. It now has 31,000 under its belt and I'm pleased to say it has been a brilliant buy, with no garage attention needed apart from tyres and MOTs. It's a pleasure to own and it's so easy to drive."

BUYER BEWARE…

■ ENGINE

Check the oil level because the smaller engines can consume up to a litre of it every 1000 miles. Coolant leaks or an overheating engine are signs of water pump failure, possibly caused by a worn belt. A new pump can cost between £50 and £80.

■ GEARBOX

Jerky shifts can afflict the dual-clutch automatic gearbox (DSG) so watch for hesitation off the mark and run the 'box up through the cogs with a motorway run to check for faults with the mechatronic unit or clutch.

■ INTERIOR

Feel the rear footwells for damp because the door seals can leak. Check for water around the dashboard, too, because faulty windscreen and sunroof seals can cause leaks as well.

Window regulators can fail, causing windows to stick or preventing them from raising or lowering properly. A new regulator can cost £25-£55.

■ WHEELS

Inspect for scuffs, particularly on the larger 16/17in alloys of higher-spec cars.

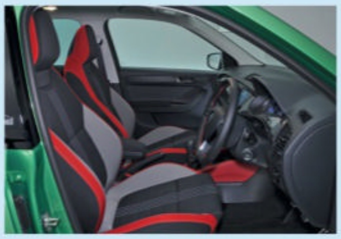
■ BODY

Steel panels dent easily so get the torch out and shine it along the bodywork to check thoroughly for smoothness. Large panel gaps can be an irregularity from the factory.

Worn hinges or a misaligned tailgate can cause the boot to stick shut.

■ AIR CONDITIONING

A broken compressor or leaks from the condenser can stop the air-conditioning system from working. A new condenser can cost around £700. Watch for issues with the air-con evaporator, which is also an expensive part to replace.



ALSO WORTH KNOWING

Diesel Fabias fall into a low insurance group so are worth considering for first-time drivers.

A light nip and tuck in 2018 brought a new front grille and slimmer headlights – optionally LED. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto were added alongside a number of interior upgrades to improve quality and refinement.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£1500-£4999

High-mileage examples, mostly with either the 1.0 or 1.2 TSI petrol engine. SE trim dominates. There's also a smattering of diesels.

£5000-£7999

You'll easily find a car with a full service history or one previous owner here. Mileage varies so shop around. More cars in Monte Carlo or SE L trim too.

£8000-£11,999

Very tidy, newer examples. Lots of 1.0 TSI Fabias with a broad mix of trims to choose from. Barely any diesels, though.

£12,000 AND ABOVE

Dealer-only cars with ultra-low miles and in mint condition.

ONE WE FOUND

SKODA FABIA 1.2 TSI MONTE CARLO, 2016, 67,000 MILES, £7490

This stylish Monte Carlo edition is fitted with the punchier 108bhp 1.2 TSI engine, which makes it ideal for both short hops and longer motorway stints. It has a partial service history and the brakes were replaced recently. It costs only £20 a year to tax, too. Just make sure those silver-rimmed alloy wheels are free of any scuffs.

My car & I

This XJ8 is more than just a pretty face

Were new cars really once as beautiful as John Kean's Jaguar XJ8 4.0? Amid today's generation of aggressively styled SUVs and crossovers, it's easy to forget that they were. Maybe it's why, despite the presence of more expensive and exotic metal at his local car meet, his Jaguar attracts a steady stream of enthusiasts keen to be reminded. "I only bought it a few weeks ago," he says. "I'd have liked an XJS, but decent ones are expensive and, in any case, aren't as practical as the XJ."

John has a thing about big petrol engines, too: "I've had a house in Sharm El Sheikh for many years and until recently owned a Jeep Wrangler with a 6.4-litre engine out there. A big engine doesn't get stressed like, for example, a 1.6 does. It's why I like the Jag's 4.0-litre V8." He bought the Jag from Horsepower Motors in Tonbridge, Kent, and paid around £4500 for it. It was registered in 1999 and has done 80,000 miles, and the body is unmarked – ditto the interior, save for some cracked leather on the driver's seat. The walnut on the dashboard is in excellent condition and the rear seats look to have been unused. "I thought it was very good value," says John. "XJs of this vintage go from £3500 to around

Our cars

Pondering the Duster's place on the drive

BY STEVE CROPLEY

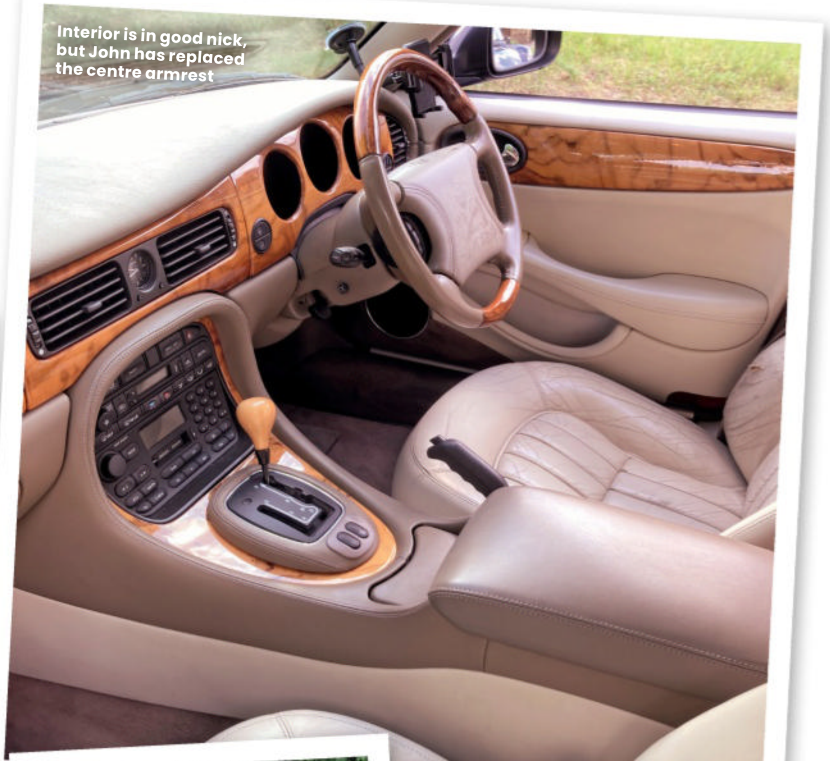
Our 21-plate Dacia Duster Comfort, which must now wear the albatross-like label 'old shape' around its neck, has just turned up 30,000 miles. It does less work these days because we have three other motors in the family fleet plus I usually bring something else home from work. But it still makes a nice change when you fire it up.

It's the only thing we own with a stick shift, its 1.5-litre diesel engine continues to insist on delivering an easy 55mpg (along with a 625-mile range) and on our bump-riddled roads its supple suspension and tall tyres laugh at the craters beneath them.

Time to decide what to do with it, though. We rarely need a backstop car these days, and the Duster does look like a wise used buy for someone else (rather than cluttering our yard). I guess our household exchequer could benefit from the £12k it's probably worth on a good day.

In my dreams, in a few months we might consolidate the Duster and the wife's 69-plate Mini Cooper S into a new Renault 5 EV (which I'm currently running as my long-termer), but she is likely to have plenty to say about that. But one way or another, I'm starting to think our household needs an electric car. It's where we're all heading. And we'll still have the Alpine A110 and Ford Raptor to keep a firm foothold in petrol-powered territory. No conclusions just yet, but it's the Duster that soon might be departing.

The Duster is likeable and practical, but it's not being used enough



Interior is in good nick, but John has replaced the centre armrest

Isn't she pretty? The Jag's elegant lines put many modern cars to shame

£7000 for the very best. You can double that with German cars. Old Jags have some catching up to do!"

John is the car's fifth owner. The previous one had it for 16 years but drove only 10,000 miles. Perhaps because of his work as a diver, John's a conscientious chap who took no risks when buying the Jag. "When you're buying a car that's 26 years old, you have to do your homework," he says. "Before I even started looking, I joined the Jaguar Owners Club and watched workshop videos to learn about the model's problems and how to fix them. For example, on the 4.0-litre engine the timing chain tensioners and water pump impeller should be replaced because they're weak spots. They're small things, but if they fail they can wreck the engine. Also, the subframe mountings can corrode badly. This car had been dormant for several months. I didn't mind that because it gave me the opportunity to see how it behaved on cold and hot starts and after a 30-minute drive. I went over it like a forensic inspector."

> **"When you buy a 26-year-old car, you have to do your homework"**

Looking ahead, John plans to fix some of the Jag's minor irritations, but to a strict budget, he says: "If you buy a £5000 car and spend £5000 on it, you haven't got a £10,000 car – more like one worth £6000, and then only if you paid the right price in the first place. So I'm going to take things steady, and rather than aiming for concours standard, simply get it up to a good standard for its age and no more." He's already on the way with a replacement fuel filler cap bought from eBay for £34 and, also from eBay, a centre armrest for £25 to replace the original that had been scuffed by, he guesses, the previous owner's cufflinks.

Meanwhile, John says he's already planning some big drives: "It can do 30mpg, so Scotland in one direction and, later, Cornwall in the other are definitely on the cards." Hopefully, he'll be showing the locals what a beautiful car looks like.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

DANNY DAVIES

2004 SUBARU FORESTER STI 2.5

VS

JACK WARRICK

2014 AUDI RS Q3 TFSI QUATTRO

Brief: Find a family-friendly compact SUV for £17,000

JW This Audi RS Q3 is the ideal potent family cruiser. It's bang on budget at £17,000, has 306bhp and is far below the average mileage at 57,000. Good service history, too.

DD My find – an immaculate, 2004 Subaru Forester STI (it's just over budget, at £17,995, but I'll haggle) – couldn't be cooler: it has done only 65,000 miles from new and it wears its unmarked coat of World Rally Blue well. Cars and coffee on Sunday, school run on Monday.

JW The brief says 'family-friendly', but your family would surely desert you if you tried taking them to school in something so brash. My RS Q3 is the far classier option, with bags more comfort and tech and a 0-62mph time faster than some sports cars.

DD Brash? This is a certified modern classic – something your excuse for an RS-badged Audi will never be. My Scooby is also completely unmodified, so it's unlikely to throw up any nasty surprises. And being a Forester, it's capable of handling anything family life could throw at it.

JW Zoinks. Admittedly, I am slightly jealous of your Forester's rally pedigree, but my Audi has that covered with its Quattro heritage. That said, I doubt either of these cars has ever seen a dirt track in its life…

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

TOYOTA YARIS CROSS 1.5 VVT-H DYNAMIC

2022, 25,000 miles, £19,899

This well-packaged Yaris Cross is fun to drive and will achieve close to 60mpg all day. It has an impressive kit roster, too, with adaptive cruise control and automatic headlights. This one is also four-wheel drive.

SUZUKI VITARA 1.6 SZ5 ALLGRIP

2018, 27,000 miles, £14,875

A full Suzuki service history, a recent full service and a 12-month dealer warranty: this Vitara Allgrip couldn't be in better shape. Like the Yaris Cross, it's loaded with decent kit including adaptive cruise, and you should get 40-50mpg from its 1.6-litre petrol engine.

SKODA KAROQ 2.0 TDI EDITION DSG 4WD

2018, 59,000, £16,148

With four-wheel drive, a smooth DSG gearbox and a punchy yet frugal diesel engine, this Karoq is an ideal family wagon. It tows up to two tonnes, too (this one has a towbar), so it can take the caravan on holiday.

FORD PUMA 1.0T ECOBOOST MHEV ST-LINE

2020, 56,000 miles, £11,995

This smart-looking ST-Line Puma has plenty of equipment plus a full Ford service history. Its potent 155bhp 1.0 Ecoboost delivers more than enough pep without sacrificing efficiency.

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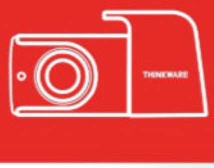

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

TX4 flopped in China, then EC7's UK launch was cancelled; Brilliance and Landwind scared off Europeans with abysmal safety

Early European struggles of Chinese car giants

Geely recently announced that it would start selling cars under its own name in the UK – over a decade later than originally planned.

Autocar first mentioned Geely in 2004, as part of a report on the emerging market and industry of China, because its first-ever car, the then six-year-old Haoqing supermini, was the cheapest of the lot. Staggeringly, it cost £2400 – but it was terribly basic and based on an ancient Daihatsu Charade.

Two years later, Geely formed a joint venture with Coventry-based Manganese Bronze Holdings (MBH) to build the upcoming LTI TX4 iteration of London's iconic black cab in Shanghai, the plan being to tempt Chinese cabbies out of their trusty old Volkswagen Jetta and Santana saloons. (MBH began life making ship propellers, if the name had you wondering.)

This didn't go very well (despite Geely painting a TX4 gold and dressing some poor local bloke as a Beefeater for the Shanghai motor show), partly because cabbies couldn't see any benefit to the expensive TX4 and partly because Chinese cities banned diesel engines.

So come late 2011, with its finances in a poor state, MBH decided to have a go at selling Geely cars in the UK – first the Emgrand EC7, a dull hatchback/saloon the size of a Skoda Octavia for the price of a Skoda Fabia: just £10,000. MBH planned to create a network of 40 dealerships, with CEO John Russell saying: "We are aware of the success that Kia and Hyundai have had in the UK and we can work with Geely to achieve similar success."

He added that a new model would arrive every year for the following five years. Second in line was the Ford Mondeo-rivalling Emgrand EC8, then a small MPV, a small SUV and "something that highlights the Chinese appetite for being experimental". Perhaps he was hinting at the Gleagle Panda city car, in which case we can all be thankful: its wide eyes and gaping mouth weren't for the faint of heart.

Qoros had big plans but never got past Slovakia...

...and Russia was the limit for Haval

Autocar's man in China drove the Emgrand EC7 in early 2012 and reported that it had hard yet flimsy interior materials; a thirsty yet underpowered 1.8-litre petrol engine; a clunky manual gearbox; a soft ride; and light steering. But, hey, it was going to cost £10k.

Actually, it wasn't, because in October 2012 MBH fell into administration with a £3.9 million black hole in its accounts, having failed to bank a profit since 2007. Geely, already a 20% shareholder, rescued LTI and quietly dropped the plan to import its cars – whether to focus fully on reinventing the black cab or to protect its brand image for any future UK endeavours, we couldn't say.

Maybe it was both, but surely it was wise, or at least fortuitous, given how long it took SAIC to restore the reborn MG brand's lustre after its faltering UK launch.

Perhaps surprisingly, Geely wasn't the first Chinese brand expected to come here. Back in 2006, Birmingham's International Motors (IM), the long-standing Subaru importer, held talks with "several", Chery being the likeliest candidate – another one that is now finally on its way, two decades later.

Around the same time, Landwind (later to earn infamy for ripping off the Range Rover Evoque) became the first Chinese brand to gain European type approval, with its dated-looking X-Pedition SUV. Europe MD Paul Williams (Kia's former UK boss) suggested a price of around €15,000, and there were hints that the UK was in its sights. But then the X-Pedition performed terrifyingly in official crash tests and was immediately withdrawn.

The exact same fate befell the Brilliance BS6 saloon at a similar time – and this from the company established as BMW's Chinese joint-venture partner.

Much more promising was Qoros, a brand specifically aimed at Europe by Chery and Israel's state investment firm whose plan was grounded in "tactical outsourcing".

We drove its Ford Focus-rivalling 3 saloon in late 2014 and felt it would be "up there with the best cars in its segment" – but it was only ever sold in Slovakia, with Qoros blaming exchange rates for cancelling its expansion plan three years later.

Also in 2014, Great Wall Motor considered sending its Haval SUVs here. Perhaps it had second thoughts after having to pause production of the H8 soon after launch due to quality issues. IM will now sell you a Haval in the form of the Jolion Pro.

KRIS CULMER

If you want to get lost in the archive...

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PG3800A	230	3	5.6	010617852	£249.00	£298.80
PG3800ADV ‡	230/110	3	5.6	010617854	£269.00	£322.80
PG6500ADVES ◆	230/110	5.5	9.7	010617856	£519.00	£622.80
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CIG81020	6.1x3x2.4m	140613572	£414.00	£315.00	£378.00	£36.00
CIG81220	6.1x 3.7x2.5m	140613576	£462.00	£349.00	£418.80	£43.20
CIG81224	7.3x3.7x2.5m	140613578	£574.80	£429.00	£514.80	£60.00
CIG81216	4.9x3.7x2.5m	140613574	£378.00	£289.00	£346.80	£31.20
CIS788	2.4x2.4x2.1m	140613582	£203.98	£149.98	£179.98	£24.00
CIG1432	9.7x4.3x3.65m	140613594	£1,294.80	£999.00	£1,198.80	£96.00
CIS81212	3.6x3.6x2.5m	140613584	£287.98	£219.98	£263.98	£24.00
CIS666	1.8x1.8x1.8m	140610666	£137.99	£99.99	£119.99	£18.00
CIS8612	3.7x2x2.4m	140613580	£251.98	£189.98	£227.98	£24.00
CIG1640	12x4.9x4.3m	140613596	£2,877.60	£2,249.00	£2,698.80	£178.80
CIB755	2.20x1.57x1.63m	140610755	£113.99	£84.99	£101.99	£12.00
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CAM36C	920/36	2	010510448	£249.00	£298.80

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ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of empirical road testing is the longest in the world. For more than a century, we have been verifying, scrutinising, describing and illustrating new cars in unparalleled detail. Driving impressions have always been a key part of this, around which the empirical tests have changed.

In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into that century of road testing with a subscription to the digital Autocar archive (visit themagazineshop.com/2025ED/ACA).

Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ 25.3.09 Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆ 9.8.23 A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.14 Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪ 29.3.17 Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆ 3.1.18 Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆ 9.1.19 A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ 28.6.23 Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ 16.5.18 Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪ 9.3.22 The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆ 15.11.23 Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★ 9.10.19 Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★⯪ 18.9.24 Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ 21.11.18 Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish ★★★★⯪ 26.3.25 Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆ 30.11.22 A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.19 Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆ 18.11.20 Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung ★★★★☆ 9.7.25 Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.	3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 15.1.25 Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 5.1.22 Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★⯪☆ 16.4.25 Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆ 5.2.25 Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 11.7.18 Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 17.6.20 Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.6.19 A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 2.6.21 A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆ 9.11.16 Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ 20.3.19 More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆ 7.7.21 Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line ★★★⯪☆ 14.5.25 Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.24 EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 12.8.15 Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.10.16 A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ 26.9.18 Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ 30.12.15 Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT ★★★★☆ 2.4.25 Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪ 18.5.16 Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ 24.4.24 Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ 22.12.21 Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪ 19.4.23 Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆ 16.4.25 Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪ 17.8.22 Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition ★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44

BMW

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport ★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé ★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport ★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive ★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition ★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS ★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50 ★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL ★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5 ★★★⯪☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro ★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive ★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible ★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition ★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition ★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition ★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯪	9.7.25	Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.	4.2	3.3	2637	2.7	314
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack ★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring ★★★★⯪	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design ★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design ★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160 ★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S ★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup ★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT ★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour ★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max ★★★⯪☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair ★★★⯪☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto ★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine ★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus ★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus ★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition ★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG ★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 ★★★★☆	18.6.25	Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.	5.6	5.1	1737	35.0	-
Tavascan V1 ★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige ★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey ★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey ★★★★☆	11.6.25	Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-

DS

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige ★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+ ★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige ★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première ★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus ★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB ★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

			0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge ★★★⯪☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima ★★★⯪☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

FORD

Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★½ 20.2.19
Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.
8.9 7.8 1417 43.8 -

Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19
Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.
6.1 4.9 1433 40.7 -

Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★½ 25.3.20
The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.
10.0 9.6 1260 50.0 -

Puma Gen-E Select ★★★★☆ 4.6.25
Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.
7.2 7.2 - 3.4 179

Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21
Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.
7.2 6.2 1301 41.5 -

Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★½☆ 23.10.24
Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.
5.8 4.8 2067 2.9 262

Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★½☆ 24.6.20
Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.
- - 1844 - -

Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆ 23.6.21
Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.
6.8 5.6 2130 - -

Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆ 27.4.22
Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.
4.2 3.5 2298 - -

Mustang Dark Horse ★★★½☆ 20.11.24
Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.
4.5 3.5 1853 26.1 -

Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★½☆ 10.7.24
Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.
10.8 10.6 1426 47.4 -

Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium ★★★½☆ 2.7.25
PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.
9.7 9.5 1876 40.3 64

Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24
Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.
12.1 11.8 1971 38.8 -

Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★½ 14.6.23
Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.
9.8 9.9 2348 36.6 -

GENESIS

G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★½☆ 10.11.21
Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.
7.2 6.7 1751 60.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Electrified G80 ★★★½☆ 12.10.22
Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.
4.4 4.0 2349 - 272

GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22
Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.
3.8 3.1 2192 - 220

GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★½☆ 15.9.21
Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.
6.7 6.6 2217 45.0 -

GWM

Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★½☆☆ 1.2.23
Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.
7.7 7.2 1580 - 154

HONDA

E Advance ★★★½☆ 26.8.20
More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.
7.9 - 1535 - 110

Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★½☆ 7.10.20
Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.
9.6 10.0 1248 57.0 -

Civic Type R GT ★★★★½ 25.10.17
Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.
5.7 7.1 1400 57.0 -

HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★½☆ 24.11.21
Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.
9.2 9.3 1397 43.2 -

e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23
EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.
8.6 6.9 1756 - 211

HYUNDAI

i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20
Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.
12.3 12.9 999 52.5 -

i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★½☆ 24.2.21
Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.
9.7 10.1 1065 63.5 -

i20 N ★★★★½ 25.8.21
N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.
6.1 5.4 1231 50.6 -

i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE ★★★½☆ 13.9.17
Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.
9.5 9.7 1425 48.9 -

Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★½☆ 7.6.23
Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.
7.2 6.2 2006 - 272

Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23
Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.
10.4 10.3 1352 50.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆ 17.3.21
Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.
7.6 6.2 1612 47.7 -

Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24
A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.
3.5 2.7 2221 - 224

Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆ 16.10.24
A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.
7.9 7.5 2007 32.9 -

Nexo ★★★½☆ 12.6.19
Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.
9.6 9.7 1852 - -

INEOS

Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★½☆ 20.9.23
Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.
8.0 8.1 2682 20.9 -

JAECOO

7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★½☆☆ 9.4.25
Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.
7.3 6.4 1814 35.0 41

JAGUAR

XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★½ 1.7.15
Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.
7.6 6.7 1530 48.7 -

XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★½☆ 17.4.19
Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.
6.6 6.2 1727 36.8 -

E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★½☆ 11.4.18
Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.
9.9 10.5 1768 49.2 -

I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★½ 12.9.18
Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.
4.5 3.5 2236 - -

F-Pace SVR ★★★★½ 24.7.19
Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.
4.1 3.5 2070 29.4 -

F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★½ 1.12.21
Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.
5.1 4.6 2264 - 24

F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆ 29.4.20
The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.
- - 1743 - -

JEEP

Avenger Electric Summit ★★★½☆ 24.1.24
Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.
8.3 6.9 1601 - 172

Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★½☆ 3.10.18
Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.
11.0 11.5 1540 44.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22
Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.
6.4 5.7 1872 46.9 22

Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★½☆ 28.10.15
Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.
10.8 11.2 1502 52.6 -

Renegade 4xe Trailhawk ★★★☆☆ 30.6.21
Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.
6.7 5.6 1816 39.4 21

Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland ★★★★☆ 10.4.19
Off-road icon is now more competent on it.
9.0 9.1 2122 37.6 -

KGM

Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★☆☆ 14.9.16
Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.
12.0 12.6 1469 - -

Torres 1.5T K40 AWD ★★½☆☆ 4.6.25
Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.
11.3 12.0 1661 35.0 -

KIA

Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★½☆ 11.9.24
No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.
13.4 13.9 985 51.4 -

Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2 ★★★★☆ 29.8.18
Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.
9.9 9.6 1411 70.3 -

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC CARS

1 Kia EV3

2 Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

3 Cupra Born

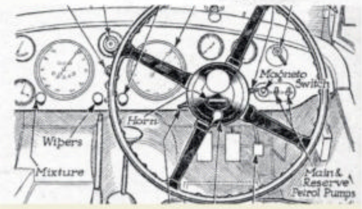
SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1973 WARTBURG KNIGHT

Reappraisal of six-year-old East German two-stroke family saloon in light of several new arrivals on the budget market. "Vastly improved performance. Poor economy when driven hard. Good ride. Dead brakes. Uncertain handling. Remarkable value for money."

Price £811
Engine 3 cyls in line, 992cc, petrol
Power 50bhp at 4250rpm
Torque 69lb ft at 3000rpm
Weight 1058kg
0-30mph 5.1sec
0-60mph 18.7sec
Top speed 87mph
Economy 27.7mpg



1937 ASTON MARTIN 15HP 2-4-SEATER

British sports car firm gives new short-wheelbase roadster a larger engine that renders it "softer, quieter and more flexible, while acceleration and general suitability for everyday purposes have increased out of all knowledge".

Price £575
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1950cc, petrol
Power 98bhp at 5000rpm (est)
Torque 95lb ft at 5000rpm (est)
Weight 1176kg
0-30mph 5.8sec
0-60mph 19.6sec
Top speed 84mph
Economy 22mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S ★★★½☆ 27.2.19 Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition ★★★½☆ 20.11.19 Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban ★★★½☆ 5.7.23 Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3 ★★★★☆ 7.9.22 A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line ★★★★☆ 31.12.24 New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S ★★★½☆ 15.6.22 Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 9.10.24 Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT ★★★½☆ 4.10.23 Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2 ★★★½☆ 20.1.21 Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 31.1.24 Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante ★★★★½ 11.10.17 Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD ★★★★½ 20.5.20 Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto ★★★★½ 4.12.24 New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus ★★★★☆ 3.7.19 Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★½ 10.2.21 A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE ★★★★☆ 8.1.20 Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury ★★★★½ 12.4.17 A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE ★★★½☆ 30.8.17 Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X ★★★★½ 13.5.20 World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1 ★★★★½ 30.4.25 Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE ★★★★½ 2.11.22 Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One ★★★½☆ 28.8.24 More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE ★★★★½ 13.7.22 A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography ★★★★☆ 9.4.25 A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design ★★★½☆ 29.5.24 Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack ★★★★☆ 16.3.22 Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport ★★★½☆ 22.3.23 Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi ★★★½☆ 6.2.19 Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition ★★★½☆ 6.11.24 Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi ★★★☆☆ 7.2.24 MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition ★★★★½ 2.4.25 The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT ★★★★☆ 28.5.25 A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R ★★★½☆ 24.7.24 There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel ★★★½☆ 12.3.14 Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo ★★★½☆ 18.10.23 A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel ★★★☆☆ 30.11.16 A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso ★★★½☆ 8.5.19 Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo ★★★½☆ 11.9.24 An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore ★★★½☆ 26.2.25 Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav ★★★★☆ 22.4.15 The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport ★★★★☆ 6.11.19 Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech ★★★½☆ 10.3.21 Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line ★★★★☆ 19.2.25 Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav ★★★★☆ 28.6.17 Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line ★★★½☆ 10.5.23 Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav ★★★★½ 2.9.15 An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S ★★★★★ 24.5.17 Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-

*For three weeks from publication date

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★⯪	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★⯪	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★⯪☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★⯪	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★⯪	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★⯪☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★⯪☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★⯪	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus	★★★★⯪	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class	★★★★☆	7.5.25	Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★⯪☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★⯪	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★⯪☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	25.11.20	MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-

MINI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
John Cooper Works	★★★★☆	14.5.25	A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★⯪☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★⯪	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★⯪☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★⯪☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★⯪☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-

TOP 3

BEST OFF-ROADERS

1 Land Rover Defender Octa

2 Jeep Wrangler

3 Toyota Land Cruiser

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-2008 GT Line	★★★⯪☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★⯪☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★⯪☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★⯪	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★⯪	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Spyder	★★★★⯪	1.4.20	Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★⯪	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★⯪	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★⯪	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
911 Carrera GTS	★★★★⯪	5.3.25	Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
Macan Turbo	★★★★⯪	4.6.14	Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★⯪☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★⯪	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★⯪☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★⯪	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC SPORTS CARS

1 Alpine A290

2 Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

3 Porsche Taycan

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★⯪	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
4 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic	★★★★☆	16.7.25	Charismatic but grown-up, the reborn 4 is a real contender.	8.2	7.5	1493	3.3	182
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five	★★★★⯪	12.3.25	Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno	★★★⯪☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★⯪☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★⯪☆	13.10.21	Eminently sensible but unspectacular.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★⯪☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost Series II Black Badge	★★★★⯪	25.6.25	Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.	4.5	3.6	2576	25.8	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★⯪	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★⯪	19.7.17	Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★⯪☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★⯪	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★⯪☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★⯪☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition	★★★★⯪	19.3.25	Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★⯪☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★⯪☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★⯪☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★⯪☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★⯪	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★⯪	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★⯪☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★⯪☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★⯪☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★⯪☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★⯪☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★⯪☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★⯪☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★⯪☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★⯪	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★⯪	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★⯪	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★⯪☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★⯪☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★⯪☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★⯪	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★⯪	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★⯪☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★⯪☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★⯪☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★⯪☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★⯪☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★⯪☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★⯪	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★⯪☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright	★★★⯪☆	2.7.25	Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.	8.0	7.5	2117	37.0	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Jaecoo 5 October
It'll land in the UK this year with the same 1.6-litre petrol engine as its Jaecoo 7 sibling.

Volkswagen T-Roc August
The second-generation T-Roc will be the first model to use VW's new full-hybrid system.

Toyota bZ3X November
Rakish, small crossover will effectively be an electric C-HR using the bZ4X's powertrain.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love... DRIVING INSTRUCTORS

BY CHARLIE MARTIN

Everyone's got a story. From slipping and sliding around an abandoned field to stalling innumerable times in a whisper-quiet side street, it seems nobody's first time driving a car goes all that well.

Yet, on most occasions, it's a tale told through a smile. What should be a deeply overwhelming experience ends up being joyful, and I reckon it's all thanks to that most unsung of automotive heroes, the driving instructor.

They teach us about everything from biting points to brake distances with a seemingly universal dry wit, maintained despite a background of long hours, months-long waits for test slots and what must be among the most treacherous working conditions in civilian life.

These brave souls wake up every morning and willingly strap themselves into the passenger seat of a tonne or more of fast-moving metal, with a total novice at the controls.

Surely, I wonder, they must stir their coffee mulling what close shaves they'll have today. Will it be errant acceleration into a pack of parked cars, an attempt to circumnavigate a roundabout anti-clockwise, or the failure to register a group of schoolchildren entering a zebra crossing?

They carry a great deal of responsibility, not just in protecting the learner in their guardianship but also the wider community exposed to the rookie at the wheel.

DRIVER TRAINING
RED

Instructors have ice in their veins – and a foot over the dual brake pedal

Given the sheer complexity of the modern car, that's no mean feat. I learned in a Ford Focus with a standard throttle, brake and clutch, but also a button-operated handbrake, drive mode selector, reversing camera, speed limit detection and an overly paranoid emergency braking system. That was daunting, but throw in the bings and bongs mandated by new legislation, or the awkward powertrain blending that can be introduced by electrification, and I can see it being downright overwhelming for a newbie.

> **"Instructors are the most unsung of automotive heroes"**

To L and back: you never know what your day will bring as an instructor

Yet the sage in the passenger seat just powers them through it. Whether it's a nurturing, guiding hand as they gradually paddle their way through side streets, or the hairdryer treatment after grating the nearside wheels on a high kerb, the driving instructor just has a way of making it work on most occasions.

Indeed, the UK's driving test pass rate tends to hover at just shy of 50%, indicating instructors are largely keeping the overall system in balance.

I also have some appreciation for the emerging community of video instructors. With just a quick search online, you can find a professional describing your local test route just about wherever you live, in pretty much every kind of car you would learn in. They're fantastic for highlighting pain points and those silly (or worryingly dangerous) mistakes that learners tend to make on failed test attempts.

But it's also rather good entertainment. I'm a particularly big fan of Conquer Driving on YouTube, featuring a car enthusiast who explains concepts in a way the budding motorist really understands. It's his videos that taught me how to rev match and how to get a manual car moving quickly under pressure.

Even if you've been driving for yonks, I bet you'll learn something from one of these instructors that you hadn't previously considered. I might even go so far as to suggest they're the true petrolheads among us, laying their wellbeing (or at the very least their wealth) on the line so that we can all take to the roads ourselves.

What we did this week

MALTA-TEASER

Did you know that a factory in Bulgaria once built the Voleex C10 supermini for China's Great Wall Motor? And that it's not related in any way to the near-identical Toyota Yaris? I didn't either, until I saw one during a recent trip to Malta. I thought Europe's sunniest country was famed for its gleaming classics, but it's actually full of interesting automotive obscurities from more recent times.
MURRAY SCULLION

SOCHAUX AND TELL

A trip to the Peugeot Museum in Sochaux, France, gave me the opportunity to get up close with the brand's best-known road and rally cars – including some real bedroom poster stars. The stunning V12 907 concept was a highlight but, as a self-professed 205 GTi fanatic, it was Juha Kankkunen's WRC-winning T16 I wanted to sneak out through the gift shop.
SAM PHILLIPS

LOCAL HERO

The launch of the Ferrari F80 (driven, p20) reminded us just how important the brand is to the Italian public. Matt Prior and I deliberately headed far off the beaten track to find a quiet road for photography, yet we still had a steady stream of locals looking around it with their jaws on the floor – including this cheery Fiat driver. There are few cars that would inspire that level of adoration in the UK.
JACK HARRISON

4 PINTS
THE NIGHT
BEFORE

One in five drink drive prosecutions happen the morning after[A], many unaware they still have alcohol left in their system from the night before. AlcoSense quickly and accurately tells you your blood alcohol level, so you don't become one of them.

The Telegraph

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A: Source: DfT Road Accident Data 2015, B: Review of the AlcoSense Pro, 24/12/15. Intellectual Property: www.alcosense.co.uk/ip. © AlcoSense Laboratories, part of Now Group UK Ltd, Unit 3 MEC, Cordwallis Street, Maidenhead SL6 7BE

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